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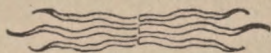
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ADA MERTON.



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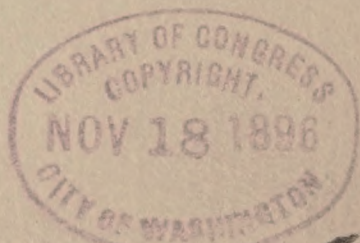
*Author of "Tom Playfair," "Percy Wynn," "Harry
Dee," "Claude Lightfoot," New Faces and Old," etc.*



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— BECKETTOLD —
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ST. LOUIS, MO.



Although it be a history
Homely and rude, I will relate the same
For the delight of a few natural hearts.

—*Wordsworth.*



ADA MERTON.

CHAPTER I.

And now what are we? unbelievers both,
Calm and complete, determinately fixed
To-day, to-morrow and for ever.

— *Robert Browning.*

ABOUT three o'clock of a spring afternoon, in one of the mansions which not so many years ago made Grand Avenue the finest residence street of St. Louis, a lady was seated in a luxuriously furnished boudoir. She was a queenly woman. Her forehead, low and broad, and her deep dark eyes wore an expression which denoted thought and study. Her face and clear complexion would lead the casual observer to judge her younger than she really was. This youthfulness of feature, however, was not at its best on the present occasion; for the nervous play of her fingers as she sat reading, and, now and then a sharp

turn of the head indicated that she was disturbed and ill at ease. At every unwonted sound from without, she would rise quickly, and gaze eagerly out of the open window. But each time her look of disappointment deepened, and with the suspicion of a sigh she would resume her volume. She had been reading for some few minutes without interruption, when the sound of the bells from the Redemptorist church hard by broke upon the stillness of the afternoon.

“O, those bells, those bells, those *meaningless* bells!” she exclaimed.

Were they meaningless? The wish is often father to the thought. At all events, there was a time when to her those bells were full of meaning; a time when at their call she hastened away cheerily in rain or shine, through mist or snow, to worship a God whose existence she now denied. She was wiser to day; so was Eve after partaking of the forbidden fruit. She was unhappier, too, for her added knowledge; so was Eve for hers. And yet why should she be unhappy? Her husband was as loving and attentive as heart could desire, and her only child — her little daughter Ada! Surely,

nature herself was divine that she could produce a being so lovely, so complete. With such a husband and such a daughter, there should be a heaven upon earth. And yet —

The opening of the gate below distracted her from her reverie, and, as she hastened to the window, her face lighted up with joy at sight of Mr. John Merton, her husband. Quickly descending the stairs, she met him in the vestibule, kissed him with affectionate welcome, and helped him off with his overcoat.

“It is Spring outside, and it is Spring within too, Mary. Your welcome is as bright as the flowers. It is such a relief from the busy, gruff, money-making people on ‘Change.’ But where is my little Ada?”

“She has not come home yet, John. Indeed, I feel somewhat worried about her; for school should have let out over half an hour ago.”

“You know what care killed, Mary,” said Mr. Merton, as they went up the stairs; “leave her alone, and she’ll come home, like little Bo Peep who lost her sheep, you know.”

“Of course, it is foolish for me to worry, John; but when either you or Ada do not

come back when I am expecting you, I cannot but feel alarmed. I suffer from a sort of waking night-mare, and cannot keep myself from imagining all manner of dreadful things.”

“When you feel that way, my dear, you should read some humorous book, or go down stairs and tell the cook your honest opinion of the last meal, or fatigue your mind by reading, let us say, the ‘Duchess.’”

These suggestions delivered in an off-hand, careless manner brought a smile upon Mrs. Merton’s face, and the husband, satisfied with the cheering effect of his remarks, took an easy chair, and composed himself to look over the evening paper.

He was nearing forty years of age. His face while masculine was singularly regular, and his well-trimmed moustache, his fashionable apparel and his studied yet easy carriage made it clear that he was by no means indifferent to his personal appearance.

“Mary,” he resumed after a hasty survey of the paper’s headlines, “I’ve been thinking seriously about Ada all day. Now really, my dear, is it not about time for us to take her in hand ourselves, and open her eyes to

the truth? She is now going on eleven, and, I believe, quite intelligent enough to understand our position, if it only be put before her in the proper light."

Although Mrs. Merton continued to smile, a slight shade of sadness clouded her face, as she replied, "I, too, John, have been thinking on this very point for some time past; and still I do not see my way to taking your view of the case. Ada is young, and apt to be led rather by authority than by reason, as is proper in all innocent little children. And besides, let us practice what we preach. We both believe in liberty of thought; now why not let the child follow her own honest convictions? Suppose she continue going to the sisters' school for a year or two more. Even then she will not be over thirteen, and at that time we can easily appeal to her reason, and show her that not everything taught by the good sisters is to be blindly believed."

"But why not send her to a non-Catholic, or better a sectarian school?" urged Mr. Merton. "I should prefer that she learn Protestant doctrine."

"That remark is scarcely worthy of you,

my dear," answered Mrs. Merton with a slight touch of scorn in her tones. "Learn Protestant doctrine! I fear she would become gray before learning what Protestant doctrine really is—or is n't. As you have often said, everything that the sects believe is to be referred back to our—to the Catholic Church, as to the fountain-head. You may smile, John, but if I did believe in God, as was the case one year ago, I would live as a Catholic; for it is the only religion that seems to be at all consistent."

"See here, Mary," said Mr. Merton, straightening himself in his chair, and gazing fixedly into her eyes, "please do not talk in that fashion. One would think you were falling back."

"No: I burnt my ships long ago. I had what they call 'faith' once, and thought then that I should never lose it. But now even in the face of death, I would never think of appealing to a God, or returning to a religion which I put aside under your guidance and teaching. Not only do I no longer believe, but I no longer even wish to believe."

Mr. Merton arose with a smile of triumph, and drew his wife to him.

“Bravely said, my dear one,” he exclaimed. “What you have said rings true; and your looks were in accord with your words. When I married you, Mary, I resolved at first, and kept my resolve for some time, not to interfere with your faith. I went on the good old-fashioned principle of letting well enough alone. But as I came to love you more and more, I felt jealous that you should have any reserves in your love for me, giving half to me, and half to an imaginary God. After the birth of our little Ada, this feeling bothered me more and more. You cannot imagine, I sincerely believe, how it vexed and annoyed me when you would leave my side of a morning to go and attend early Mass: and so, after five or six years of silent objection, I resolved that it was about time to open your eyes. But it wasn’t quite so easy a task.”

“No, indeed,” assented Mrs. Merton.

“I thought you would see the truth just as soon as I put it to you, whereas for a long time you fought against me with all the subtilty of a Jesuit: And I was very glad

at the end of three long years that at last my words and arguments were beginning to make an impression on you. But now that you have declared you no longer even wish to believe, I think that my victory is crowned. Henceforth, I shall never doubt you."

Mrs. Merton's face flushed with pleasure. Words of praise are ever welcome; but when they come from those who are highest and dearest in our estimation, they receive an added value in the love of the giver. Mr. Merton was not slow to observe the effect of his words, and, resolved on gaining his point, continued: —

"And by the way, Mary, there's one thing yet I think you ought to attend to without further delay. Why not let Ada know that you are no longer a Catholic?"

Mrs. Merton was about to reply but checked herself, as the patter of a light footstep was heard upon the stairs.



CHAPTER II.

Blue were her eyes as the fairy flax ;
Her cheek as the dawn of day ;
Her bosom white as the hawthorn buds
That ope in the month of May.

— *Longfellow.*

ADA Merton—for she it was—resembled her mother as the rose-bud resembles the rose. She was prettily attired, in a fashion which manifested a fond mother's care and taste at once. Ada's beautiful face was made winning by her blue eyes. These windows of the soul revealed to all who gazed into their innocent depths the lovely history of a short, but pure, holy, and joyful life; of a shining soul beautiful still with the unsullied robe of baptism, and enriched by the precious graces which come at the call and prayer of Christ's well-beloved little ones. In every feature dwelt that look of happiness which springs from innocence that has no dark memories in the past, and that sees no black shadows in the future. It was a look of happiness which slipped so easily into the radiant smile,

that it were difficult to distinguish the point of transition. No one could come into contact with Ada without loving the child; no one could love her without loving at the same time the sweet innocence which made and kept her what she was.

On entering the room, she kissed her father with eager affection, then turned to her mother, who folded her to her bosom in the good old-fashioned way which all fond mothers, I doubt not, have kept up by a natural tradition since the days of mother Eve.

“You are late, my little pet,” cried Mrs. Merton.

“Yes, mamma; but Sister Felicitas asked me to stay after school, and I’ve got such good news. — O! I am sure you will hardly believe it.”

“What is it, darling?” asked the mother with much sympathetic interest in her voice, as she drew Ada to her side, and gently stroked the child’s fair tresses.

Ada smiled, shook her head with an air of mystery, and pointed to Mr. Merton who, apparently unconscious of this bit of by-play, was again reading the paper.

"I'm afraid papa won't like to hear it," she said in a whisper.

"Just imagine that I'm down town," broke in the father, who had not been so engrossed with the paper as Ada had supposed. "Count me out for this time, Ada, and tell mamma what you please. Even if I do happen to overhear it, I promise not to have it published."

"Now, papa, there you are making fun of me, as if anyone would care about publishing anything I have to say. But, papa, I shall tell you too, only I hope you won't be angry."

"If you wish it, Ada, I will count a hundred before I say a word. Go on now, with your news. Shall I count?"

Ada with a puzzled expression cast an enquiring eye upon her father, who met her gaze with a face of the utmost gravity; but judging from her mother's laugh that he was quizzing her, she went on:

"Well, first of all, after class this afternoon Sister Felicitas examined me in my catechism; and I did n't miss but less than half of a question in half an hour."

"O, that's your news is it?" cried the

father. "Well, I congratulate my little girl most heartily. To have a fine memory is a great advantage, and the learning of the catechism word for word, while it is an excellent test of the memory, is also one of the best exercises for developing it."

Mrs. Merton, as her husband spoke, was watching Ada's countenance.

"That is not your news, Ada," she said, "though it is very good news too. What else, dear?"

"Well, mamma, Sister Felicitas was very much pleased, and told me that I might join the class that is preparing for first Communion."

"The deuce!" muttered Mr. Merton, throwing aside his paper with a start and a frown; "this *is* news." And he bit his lip, and began pulling at his mustache.

"But, Ada," said the mother, whose face to the eager eyes of the child seemed disappointingly cold, "you are much too young: you must wait till you are twelve. 'Birdie, wait a little longer, till the little wings are stronger.'" She added the quotation from the poet in a playful tone; for she saw how pained was the child at her first words.

But Ada was not to be diverted into playfulness on *this* subject.

“O mamma!” she said with voice so appealing and face so pitiful, that Mrs. Merton could not withstand her silent eloquence.

“Well, darling, I can’t disappoint you: have your own way.”

Ada’s face glowed with pleasure.

“Stuff — nonsense — superstition — humbug,” muttered in an almost inaudible growl the husband from the sofa.

“See here, papa,” said Ada with her beautiful smile and with her little fore-finger raised in an admonitory manner, “you just keep quiet for a while, and I’ll pray and pray till you believe just exactly the same as mamma and I. Won’t he, mamma?”

“Yes, dearest: I hope we shall all believe the same thing soon.”

The conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of the negro porter, who in addition to his other duties had the proud charge of escorting Ada to and from school. He was an old servant in the family, as was indeed very evident.

With a gesture of greeting to his master and mistress which was a compromise between a nod and a bow, Bob straightened up, put on a very serious look which lasted for but a moment, and then burst into the happiest of smiles.

“What’s the matter, Bob?” asked Mr. Merton. “Have you good news, too?”

“She’s done tole you,” chuckled Bob, rubbing his hands. “Mebbe she ain’t a smart little one. O no! Now, Massah, ain’ she done tole you bof?”

“Told us what?” asked the master of the house, who, brought up in the slave days under Bob’s personal care, allowed the old negro many liberties.

“Why, dat she’s a-gwine fur to make her fust Communion. She done tole me all about it, comin’ heah from school. An’ she’s de happies’ little gal in de whole city of St. Louis. Bless her heart, I’s e willin fer to bet dat ef she had a nice par o’ wings on her, she’d make just as lubly an angel as you can coteh flyin’ ’roun’ de golden street.”

Ada laughed, and Bob gazed at her with serio-comical indignation. Mr. Merton was amused.

“So,” queried Mr. Merton quizzingly, “you believe that angels have wings, do you?”

“Cose I does,” answered the negro with energy and respectful indignation. “I’s no cognostic like some people I knows, who don’ blieve in nuffin ’cept what dey sees. I’s got religion; an’ I tell you what, Massa Mutton, you’s gwine to git lef’ some o’ dese fine days, sho’s de Lawd made little apples. As de good book says, ‘you mus’ be a lubber ob de Lawd, or you nebber git to hebben when yo’ die.’ ” Bob emphasized the quotation by setting it to a peculiar nasal but musical monotone, and rolling the whites of his eyes in a manner peculiar to gentlemen of his color when unusually devout.

“Quite a respectable homily, Bob,” returned his master. “But is this all you came to see me about?”

“Da’s a fac’; I kem mighty neah fergitten to ax yo’ ef you want de bay hosses or de oder par hitched up.”

“Take the bays, Bob.”

“En I clean forgot about de new ha’nness. It has jist come. Yo’ like to see it?”

“Ah! has it? You bring your real news last, as a woman puts the point of her letter into the postscript. — Well, my dears, if you excuse me for a minute or two, I shall go to see what sort of taste Bob has in the choice of harness.” And Mr. Merton followed by his sable spiritual admonitor left the room. No sooner was the door closed upon them, then Ada turned to her mother with a look of wistfulness and trouble.

“I wonder, mamma, whether it is not my sins that keep papa from knowing and loving God?”

“Not yours, dearest,” answered Mrs. Merton, drawing the child close, and fondling her with hungry tenderness.

“I hope not,” pursued Ada; “for I am trying my very best to do nothing wrong. I say a pair of beads every day for poor papa, and during the consecration at Mass, I always think of him.”

“That is so like my little girl,” said the mother still fondling the child, and struggling hard against an uneasy feeling, which often came upon her during such colloquies with Ada; — a feeling all the more distressing that she was unable to analyse it.

“Your father and I are always very happy when we see how much you love us. But tell me, my little darling, do you think you would love me and papa still more, if you did not know that there was a God?”

Ada’s smile left her, and a look of dismay came upon her mobile countenance.

“Why, mamma, that is nonsense, is n’t it? It sounds so strange! And just a while ago when I told you about my being allowed to make my first Communion, you almost scared me, mamma; and I felt like shivering.”

“I scare you, Ada!”

“Yes, mamma: I expected you to be so glad, and instead there was a sort of a look on your face—I don’t know what it was,—but it was not glad; and I felt so surprised and sorry. I could not help thinking that you were angry with me.”

“With you, my pet? No, indeed, Ada; I was not, I could not be angry with you.”

“Well, then, mamma, you were vexed that I was going to make my first Communion this year.”

“Oh, but that is quite another thing, dear. You are right, Ada. I don’t like it. You

see, I think that if you waited another year, you would be older, — and often it is better to wait a year or two than go to Communion without knowing well and clearly what you are doing.”

“But, mamma, do you think that I am too young to know what I am doing?”

Mrs. Merton paused before replying. She tried to be truthful with her child, and, with the single exception of her change of faith, she was wont to answer every question frankly.

“Well, my dear, many people hold that it is not good for most children to go to Holy Communion till they are over twelve. Then they are more developed, and more in earnest.”

“And was that your only reason for not being glad, mamma; just because you wanted me to be better prepared?”

“N—no. But I do not care to tell my little girl the other reason: she is too young to understand it. But you must n’t try to be a saint all at once.” Mrs. Merton uttered this last remark in such a way that it was hard to say whether she spoke in jest or earnest. It was meant to be tentative.

“Of course, I’m going to try to be a saint! we all must try to be that. Sister Felicitas said in class the other day that our Lord wants every one of us to be saints.”

“Nonsense!”—Here Mrs. Merton checked herself and added more mildly, “I suppose Sister Felicitas doesn’t mean everything that she says.”

In spite of herself, Ada could not hide the chilling effect which these words had upon her. The mother saw that she had scandalized her child, and involuntarily the terrible words of Christ denouncing those who scandalize His little ones recurred to her.

“I am sure, Mamma,” answered Ada recovering herself partially, “that you would not speak so of Sister Felicitas if you knew her. All the girls in our class love her, and think she is a real saint. I pray that I may become like her.”

“Now, now, Ada, you are not thinking of becoming a nun, are you?”

“O, I don’t think so far off as that,” answered Ada dreamily. “But all I mean is that I’m trying to be good and gentle like Sister Felicitas. She often tells us to act always as if we saw our guardian angel

beside us. Don't you often think of your guardian angel, mamma?"

"Why, child, what strange questions you ask: of course, I think of him—sometimes." Mrs. Merton was treading on dangerous ground. As she answered, her face flushed, and she turned away her eyes.

"Do you?" cried Ada with a look of gladness. "So do I often, mamma: and, do you know, sometimes it seems to me that, if I keep myself free from sin and from all wilful faults, God may let me see my angel before I die."

"I see my angel every day," rejoined Mrs. Merton, playfully yet in full earnest. "For you, my little one, are my dear angel; and you, my little one, are always showing me the way to heaven."

Ada was puzzled. She would have been pained had she known what her mother meant by the word "heaven." That word on Mrs. Merton's lips bore no reference to the land beyond.

"But come, my dear," added Mrs. Merton. "I see the carriage is waiting: let us not delay your father."

CHAPTER III.

For even as ruin is wrought by rain,
Beating hard on the mellowing crops,
Making the labor of farmers vain,
Smiting and blighting the barley tops,
So is wrack in the souls of men
Wrought by passion, desire and sin.

C. J. C.

WHILE the Mertons are driving along the fine boulevards of Forest Park, then, as now, the chosen driving resort of St. Louisans, it will be well for the reader to learn something of Mr. and Mrs. Merton's antecedents.

John Merton was the son of wealthy Catholic parents. As far as they were Catholic, it was good for John; as far as they were wealthy, it was bad. While not prepared to assert absolutely that wealthy parents, because they are wealthy, are a misfortune to a boy, the present writer humbly submits that in the generality of cases they are. In one of his latest stories for boys—and may he gladden us all by writing many another—Mr. Egan makes the following

remark, which it is well for those having care of the young to bear in mind:—"When a boy has a comfortable home and everybody is kind to him, and clothes and food and warmth and books seem to come as a matter of course, he will probably become selfish without knowing it." John Merton was, at the age of fourteen, light-hearted, gay, witty, perfectly good-natured and perfectly selfish. His good traits were recognized by everyone, but I doubt whether any true friend, brushing aside the exterior qualities which make many a boy lovely to eyes that see not beneath the surface, ever endeavored to reveal to the boy his inner self; to show him how he never turned his hand, took one thought, formulated a single wish, which in some way or other was not to turn to his immediate account. On the other hand, his parents, as I have said, were Catholic, and, according to the usual standard, good Catholics at that. The mother was really devout; she trained her boy carefully in his religion and in his duties; and, if she were blind to his defective character, let us pardon this fault of blindness which loses much of its reproach

and even takes on a certain sweetness in the holy light of a mother's tender love. She died when John was fifteen, and one year later her husband followed her. John's father was a business man first, and a Catholic second. Accordingly, he left his son in the charge of a person who was noted for his qualities as a financier. True, the guardian had no religion at all; but, to the man who puts business first, religion second, such a consideration, to use his own figure, "does not cut much of a figure." Shortly after the death of his father, John was sent to a boarding school. It was fashionable: the rest is not written. If along with his religious training young Merton had had a little manliness, he might have practiced his religion even in these unhealthy surroundings. But he had just that amount of manliness, which we expect to find in people who are thoroughly selfish, and thoroughly good-natured. He called himself a Catholic, when there was no escaping the admission — that was the extent of his religion. Allowed a liberal supply of pocket-money, he spent lavishly; so that, very soon, he was quite barnacled with friends.

In a short time, Merton's freedom extended itself even to his conversation. Then, it went to his reading. The French novel, the infidel pamphlet, books free in tone, independent of all canons, whether of taste or of thought or of logic,—such had now become his mental food. We may pass over in silence the next two or three years. John was perfectly respectable — which, being interpreted, means that he dressed well, had a good manner, and, as to the rest, was not found out. Now a sinful life such as he was leading is bound to cloud the mind. It is no wonder, then, that he soon ceased to entertain any belief in a place of eternal torments; no wonder that he soon lost, to all intents and purposes, the faith which he had received in baptism, and strengthened in the sacraments of his church. If there is anything that clouds the intellect, dulls it to all that is highest and noblest, and crushes into silence and insensibility the conscience which once was quiveringly delicate, it is the deadly enervating, baneful fume of impure thoughts. To men thus poisoned, however aesthetic they may be in regard to sensuous beauty,

to sight, to sound, to color, to taste, to fragrance, yet they cannot rise with their wingless thoughts to the super-sensible. They remind one of flies in a jar of honey—in a sweetness which cannot last, from which they cannot rise, which is to be their destruction. To men of this kind the high and holy doctrine of the Incarnation and the Redemption seem as some childish fairy tale. How far John Merton's excesses would have led him, it is impossible to say, had he not, fortunately, conceived a strong love for Miss Arden, at that time one of the leading *debutantes* in St. Louis society. It was not generally known that he was an infidel. Miss Arden had not the least suspicion. Hence, after a short period of wooing, he succeeded with but small difficulty in gaining his suit; and Miss Arden, without knowing aught of the inner life of him to whom she was to cleave in sorrow and in joy, in life and until death, surrendered herself blindly to be his helpmate for better or for worse. These things are done every day.

Mrs. Merton, at this time, united in herself a strong love for religion, and a strong love for the world. They were seemingly

parallel lines in her character. On the face of it, one would think that two such loves could not co-exist. But we cannot argue against facts. Worldliness and religion sometimes go together—they are dangerous neighbors, and however parallel they seem to be they are likely in the long run to cross each other. Then one or the other must give.

She had always been a devout girl; but like many of her class she had compromised with her conscience on the one question of worldliness. After the first years of marriage, her husband undertook to inform her of his religious views. She was shocked, and the revulsion of feeling made her, for a time, more devout than ever before. She eagerly essayed to convince her husband of his errors; but the young infidel, or agnostic, as he called himself, was, to do him justice, far better armed on his side of the controversy than she on hers, and soon silenced her strongest arguments.

Years passed on, and the vantage-ground of battle had changed. Merton plied his wife with infidel books; he assembled about his table men of culture, but of no belief; he enkindled in his wife, by subtle means,

the desire of becoming a queen in society. His temptations succeeded but too well. Mary Merton began to neglect the sacraments;—the theatre on Saturday night and Communion on Sunday morning do not appear to have a very natural connection. Nor was it long before she arrived at the conclusion that, to retain her hold in fashionable circles, Lent could hardly be kept as a season of penance. Following this, her Easter duties were neglected; and so the miserable, worldly woman found herself in the same situation as her husband had been years before — anxious to believe there was no hell.

Bravely did John Merton come to the rescue; and, at the time that our story opens, she had been one year an unbeliever. In the meantime, little Ada happily ignorant of her mother's defection was attending a convent school, and growing more and more saint-like every day.

Husband and wife were devotedly attached to each other. They had but one life (so they believed) and they would make the most of it: they had the actual "acre of Middlesex," and laughed at the "princi-

pality of Utopia." In loving each other and seeking each other's comfort, they had staked their happiness. The progress of Ada in mind and body was the one other grand object of their lives. So far they had been happy. Their heaven upon earth seemed to be flawless. But since the days that men wandered from God and walked in their own ways, since the days that the peoples of the earth boldly raised the proud head of Babel up into the very face of the heavens, thousands and millions of erring mortals have attempted to build their heaven upon this earth, only to hear in the hey-day of their joy;

"The house was builded of the earth,
And shall fall again to ground."



CHAPTER IV.

"I have at home a flawless diamond ring."

"And I a jewel that would grace a king."

"Better than both," there came a third voice mild,

"I have at home a sinless little child."

— *Anon.*

More things are wrought by prayer than this
world dreams of.

— *Tennyson.*

AS Ada alighted from the carriage, on their return from Forest Park, there was a pensive, bewildered, half-frightened air about the little child. She could not bring herself to dwell upon it, and yet the thought would come that her father had shocked her. He had spoken more plainly than was his wont; he had openly derided practices and beliefs which were most sacred to her; and twist it and turn it as she might, she could not interpret favorably her father's conduct. Her mother, too, though not siding with Mr. Merton, had protested so faintly as almost to countenance his remarks.

The poor child loved her parents intensely; and it is the words of those we love which inflict the deepest pain. Some

writers tell us that the heart given to God is selfish and narrow, cares nothing for relatives and friends, and offers all that is nearest and dearest on the shrine of eternal love. They go on to instance what they are pleased to call the proverbial "coldness" of monks and nuns; and assert that by rule a religious is obliged to "hate father and mother." These assertions are about as close to the truth as that of another class of writers who insist that as a rule the monk or the nun is in religion on account of blighted affection. As a matter of fact, when we love God as He desires us, we love all things else in Him and for Him. The most affectionate hearts, the truest souls, the noblest lives are to be found under the veil of the nun or the habit of the religious. "As radiancy," says Cardinal Manning, "is a part of light, so the love of mankind flows in a direct stream from the love of God. In the measure in which we love God, in that measure we shall have more heart-felt love to all that are about us. A father will be a better father, and a mother a better mother; son and daughter will be better children; they will love each other more, and friends

will love one another more in the measure in which they love God more.”

So Ada in loving her Creator clung all the closer to her parents, and the one sorrow of her young and gracious life was now beginning, inasmuch as she could no longer disguise from herself the fact that while her father openly flouted her most sacred and cherished beliefs, her mother repelled the child's confidences with a coldness which could not be misunderstood.

After supper that evening, Mr. and Mrs. Merton went out to attend an evening reception, leaving Ada to the solitude of her little room. It was on the same floor as were the apartments of her parents, but looking towards the west so as to command an extensive view of the beautiful suburbs of the city, and away beyond them the green fields, the early corn, and shady forests of the country, with here and there a cosy little farmhouse. The room was beautifully fitted up. About the walls hung pictures of our thorn-crowned Saviour, his sorrowful Mother, and the sweet, virgin-wreathed St. Agnes. Next to a book-case filled with choice volumes, many of them written expressly for the

young, was Ada's study desk; above which was a shrine, blooming and fragrant with flowers, in honor of the Sacred Heart.

Beside the desk was a dainty *prie-dieu*, upon which lay a silver crucifix—the child's dearest treasure. Kneeling down, and kissing the crucifix with tender reverence, Ada remained for a few moments in earnest prayer. Then rising, she seated herself at her desk, and began her studies for the following day's class. The little girl possessed fine talent, and (a thing which does not always accompany that gift) she loved her books. She had been working for over an hour, when she was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"O, is it you, Maggie?" she exclaimed, as her maid entered, "I'm glad you have come; for I was wishing to tell you the good news. Sit down."

"The good news, is it?" said Maggie her ruddy kind face breaking into a perfect sun-burst of smiles. "Now, what is it, my dear girl?"

"I am going to make my first Communion next Easter, Maggie."

"Are you, now? Well, sure, I'm delighted

to hear it, and I'd just like to see any one deny it." Here Maggie, who without prejudice to her honest, kindly nature, might be described as a good-natured maid of a staccato temperament, looked around with momentary asperity to catch the inaudible protest of some imaginary opponent. "And, darling," she continued, breaking into a smile again, "how did your father like it?"

The smile died away from Ada's face. "O Maggie," she cried, "he was so vexed, and looked displeased all the time we were out driving. And I had thought mamma would be so glad; and instead she seemed to be put out almost as much as papa."

"Now, was she, alannah?" said Maggie soothingly, her honest cherry complexion glowing like a cloud of evening in the western sky; "she's been reading more of that grinning monkey of a French philosopher, Vulture—or some such carrion, heathenish name—I suppose. May the devil fly away with those infernal books against faith—God forgive me for saying of the same, and for bringing such an ugly subject into this here little room, where there's a sweeter, holier, lovelier little heart, than

those heathenish writers ever dreamt of, since the days they were weaned which was a great pity all around, seeing as they should never have grown up at all. There now, Miss Ada," she concluded, having equally expended her breath and her indignation, "I've said my say out, and I'd like to see anybody unsay it." This peroration, begun with swelling veins and snapping eyes, was no sooner ended than Maggie lapsed into her wonted state of unindignant benevolence.

"Do you think mamma reads many books against faith, Maggie?" and the poor girl's face quivered with pain in fear of the answer.

"Do she," answered Maggie, who, in an unusual state of warmth, was wont to become more and more rudimentary in her language, "she does be reading them agnostuck writers all the time; and that grand Turk your father—Lord forgive me for saying so, but, as far as faith goes, he might as well be a Turk as not, and nobody any the wiser—he buys her them books faster than she can read 'em. But why are you crying, Ada?"

The child leaned her head upon her old

nurse's bosom, and for a few moments sobbed.

"Poor, dear, little Ada," said Maggie in softened tones, "it's a shame for me to be talking the way I do. Instead of cheering and consoling the darling little girl I learned to walk and used to carry about in my arms, here I come like a tattooed Hottentot with my cock and bull stories, a-making things ten times worse than they are—cheer up, allannah, now do—you're father isn't half as much a Turk as I am."

"Ah, Maggie, it makes me so sad, thinking that my father doesn't love nor care for the dear Saviour who died for him; and mamma, too, though she believes, doesn't seem to love God at all."

"That's all true, my darling, all the truth, and nothing else *but* the truth," Maggie returned, with some dim memory of an oath she had once heard administered in court. "But we can pray for them, and if we pray enough we're bound to be heard."

"Yes, Maggie; but I have prayed so long; day and night I have prayed to the Heart that is so full of graces, and yet my prayers seem not to be heard."

“Wait a little, darling. Patience and perseverance will bring a snail to Jerusalem. And I’ll pray with you, and we will keep on praying till both your pa and your ma believe in God, and all his holy truths—which they will of course sooner or later—and I’d like to see anybody say they wouldn’t, now!”

“Well, Maggie, we will pray as hard as we can. And don’t forget to ask the Infant Jesus to keep me from all sin so that when he comes to me in holy Communion, he may feel perfectly at home. Good night, Maggie.”

Upon Maggie’s departure, Ada having extinguished her light, walked to her window and stood gazing upon the calm and clear night. The moon was just appearing in the heavens, and a thousand stars were performing the magnificent course, from which they had never departed, since their Creator had said, “Let there be light.” A few dark clouds, like wandering spirits, were moving along obscuring, here and there, the jewelled bosom of the firmament; scarce a sound invaded the stillness of nature’s repose. And as Ada surveyed the heavens, thoughts born of the tranquil

beauty of the night passed through her mind. She wondered whether it was not at such a time as this that the fertile plain of Judea shone in the light of glory, and the bright angels of the heavenly band brought tidings of joy to all the nations; whether it is not at such a time as this that the same glad spirits still continue, though veiled from our eyes, to carry messages of love from the throne of Divine peace to the troubled hearts of men; whether even now among these myriad envoys of heaven there might not be one who bore some powerful grace to her hapless parents. Nature to her was an endless book of beauty. Every creature of the great God raised her soul to Him and His imperishable home. Breathing a sigh, she turned, after a few moments, to her *prie-dieu*, and earnestly prayed for father and mother, who little dreaming of their Ada's vigil, were following their round of pleasure. She told her beads; then recited the Litany of the Blessed Virgin — all for her parents. Finally, with arms outstretched and unsupported, she continued her prayers, thinking at the same time of Him who for three long

weary hours prayed in the same position upon the Cross. And as she persevered in prayer, the moon rose slowly higher in the sky, and flecked the room with silver bars, and threw a bright mantle of glory around the fragile form of the praying child.



CHAPTER V.

Kind gifts to some, kind words to more,
Kind looks to each and all she gave,
Which on with them through life they bore,
And down into their grave.

— *Aubrey De Vere.*

“GOOD by, my dear, and be sure not to
G be late coming home.”

“Good by, mamma,” answered Ada as, kissing her mother, she set off, satchel in hand, to school, under the charge of master Bob.

“Missy Ada,” said Bob when they had gained the street, “how does it come dat some folks is drefful pooah, while odders is jist a rollin’ in de lap of luggery?”

“Why, Bob, would you like to see one person just as rich as another?”

“Dat’s jist de way to put it, Missy Ada. I’s jist as good as de mos’ white trash wot I knows of.”

“Never mind, Bob, if you be a good man, you’ll be better off in the next world than a good many of the ‘white trash.’ ”

“Well, I *is drefful* good. I ’spect I habn’t done nuffin bad, sence I’s been a-working for your pa who am a fuss class massa, ’cep’ he don’t blieve nuffin he can’t see. Why, if you go in a rest—rest.”—Here Bob paused and made that head-gesture usually indicative of jogging the memory. Suddenly the forgotten word sprang from the recesses of his hidden lore like a verbal Minerva.—“Ah, into a resturent, ef you go into a resturent, you ain’t a gwine to see nuffin on de table ’cep’ de castors—’cos de dinnah am in de ketchin. Now it ud jest be like your pa to walk out o’ dat resturent, as chockfull o’ emptiness as he kem in, ’cos he don’t blieve in no dinner dat he can’t see,—Dat,” added Bob in a low, mysterious tone, as though he were imparting a secret of no common value,—“dat, Missy Ada, is all de doctrine of de cognos-tics.”

“What is?” asked Ada.

“Why, dat dey don’t blieve nuffin dat dey don’t see. But dese matters is too perfound fo’ you, Missy Ada, darefore, let’s drop him. I’s kine o’ sorry, Missy, we

wont go to school togedder in de nex' world nor eber see each udder."

"Why, Bob," Ada enquired, her eyes brightening with merriment, "don't you think I have a chance for heaven?"

"Cose; but you goes to de white tr——, white folks' hebben; an' de Lawd will send ole Bob among de cullud pussons."

"You're talking nonsense now, Bob. How can you believe such things as that?"

"Well, you see, Missy Ada, I'se a shoutin Meffodis', an' hab de right to blieve what I like. Now from wot I hab seen, I'se 'cluded dat de Lawd ain't a gwine to mix people in de new Jooslem. You 'member Massa Stanley, de grain spekelater? He done your pa out o' a heap o' money, an' robbed lots o' pooah folk. Wen he committed suicide, he was wuff a million dollahs, an' all de big folk went to his funral. I was dar, an' when de preacher said dat we was all jussified by faith, an' dat massa Stanley was a singin' Glory Yallow-looyer wid de angels, I says to myself, I says;—'de Lawd ain't goin' to make pooah 'spectable niggah man 'sociate with sech bad men as *dat*.' So I'se

excluded, Missy Ada, dat cullud pussons is gwine to hab annuder hebben."

"I'm afraid, Bob, that your religion is not the right one; but some day, please God, you will become a good Catholic."

"I dunno', Missy Ada, but what I will. I 'clar' 'fore hebben, Missy, when I sees you so good an' kine to pooah black niggah like me, an' sees you so good an' lubbin' to all pooah folks, I jest feels all ober dat your 'ligion's de mos' 'spectable a-goin'."

"Very good, Bob, next Sunday I'm going to send you to a priest."

"I'se a willin', Missy."

Up to this point of their talk they had been advancing in the direction of the convent; but now, they turned aside, and proceeded towards a dilapidated hovel, standing lone on a large, open lot.

"Poor Mrs. Reardon!" said Ada, as they drew near the dwelling, "God sends her many trials."

"Dat's a fac'," answered Bob, "I wonder ef her old man is home. Ef he is, I reckon I'll tech him up a little."

"Now Bob," said Ada shaking her finger

at him, "you musn't do a thing unless I tell you."

They had reached the threshold, as they spoke, and it was impossible for them not to hear the sound of an angry, scolding voice within. As Ada knocked, the voice ceased, and a dead silence ensued. Not waiting for permission to come in, the child entered followed by Bob. A sad scene met their eyes. Mrs. Reardon a woman barely of middle age, whose hair had been already silvered by care and distress, stood by the door weeping: on a bed, in one corner of the room lay an emaciated boy of eight, his flushed cheeks and bright eyes betokening fever; and, supporting himself by clinging to a table, stood the master of the family, his beard and hair unkempt, his dress disordered and his eyes burning with a light common equally to drunkenness and to insanity. As the new-comers entered the room, the little child smiled with pleasure, the woman dried her eyes, while the man turned away his bloated face for very shame.

"Good day, good day," said Ada with a pleasant smile of greeting; "you have trouble this morning," she added in a lower

tone to Mrs. Reardon. "Poor woman, what a pity Mr. Reardon can't keep from drinking."

"God help me, Ada, but he was once as kind a husband as ever drew the breath of life. And now if you look at his miserable face you can see no sign of the manly, merry fellow he once was."

"Ada!" cried the child from his bed, "I'm so glad to see you; come here, Ada, and tell me another of those beautiful stories."

"And so, Geordie, you are still alive enough to care about my stories are you? Well, now, what shall it be?"

"Tell me something more about the angels, Ada."

The girl thought for a moment, and then in a quiet, simple manner repeated to him, as she remembered it, one of Father Faber's exquisite "Tales of the Angels." The mother stood by listening with no less interest than her child; the miserable father, still balancing himself by means of the chair, heard with growing shame of those blessed spirits than whom he had been created a little less; while master Bob divided his attention between bestowing a look of

compassion upon the boy, lavishing frowns upon the master of the house, and lending an occasional ear to the story itself.

“Now, Geordie,” said Ada after the tale had been told, “it is time for me to go to school. But I have something nice for you—just the thing for a fever, mamma says.”

Ada took from her satchel two large oranges and a slice of cake. The grateful boy little knew, though he had been receiving such presents daily, that Ada was giving him—sacrificing to him—all the palatable dainties which Mrs. Merton had fondly destined for her daughter’s luncheon.

“Thank you, Ada, thank you a thousand times; it isn’t so much for the oranges or the cake I care; but your kindness,” and the child’s eyes, even as he spoke, filled with happy tears.

“God bless you for a good angel,” said the mother: “and if my prayers can do such as you any good, you shall have them, and welcome.”

“Indeed, they will do me good: good morning, Geordie; good morning Mrs. Reardon.”

“Hold on, Missy Ada,” broke in Bob at

this juncture, who felt that he had a duty to acquit himself of before society. "'Fore you go, I want to impress my 'pinion on this heah man. Isn't yo' ashamed of you-sef, sah? What do you mean, by comin' home to de family in sech a condition? You'se a bad man, and wants a soberin' up, an' dis chile's de man who knows how to tend to dat part of de business.'" And Mr. Bob picked up a convenient bucket of water, with the intention of giving its rightful owner the full benefit of the contents. But Reardon would not tamely submit to this; he made a rush at master Bob, and what would have ensued, it is impossible to say, had not Ada interposed her tiny person between the two.

"Now, Bob," she said, "what did I tell you before you came in? It's a shame for men to fight before women."

"Berry well, Missy, it ain't de right cose to fight afore women; an' I'se drefful shamed o' myself. Look heah, you one," he continued addressing his remarks to Reardon, "ef you'se a gwine to git cantankerous agin, while I'se around; I'll—I'll—spifficate you; and don't you forgit it."

Reardon, ordinarily bold and fearless, was meek as a lamb before the amiable child visitor; and taking no notice of Bob's vituperative eloquence, at length summoned courage to speak to the girl.

"God forgive me, Miss Ada, for being the brute I am, with my child lying sick in bed, and my wife wasting her very life at work. I am worse than a brute. But pardon me this time, Miss Ada."

"Mr. Reardon," Ada answered, "I hope that you and I may become great friends yet; good morning, now; and Geordie, I hope you'll be better to morrow." With these words, Ada left the house: master Bob stalked after her, muttering between his teeth, and shaking his head fiercely; after some time, however, he recovered his usual serenity, and his face became about as sunshiny as a gentlemen of color's can well become.

"Dat's a berry good woman, Missy Ada."

"Indeed she is, Bob; she has many hard things to bear in this world; but the good God will make up for her troubles in the next."

“De fac’ is, Missy Ada, I’s e no disjections to bein’ in de same hebben as her,” Bob continued after a moment’s meditation. They had now reached the convent gate, and Bob took his departure.



CHAPTER VI.

Hide not the clouds among,
Brightest star and fairest,
Until her song those heavens along
Between thy wings thou bearest.

— *Aubrey De Vere.*

I sit to night by the fire-light,
And I look at the glowing flame,
And I see in the bright red flashes
A Heart, a Face and a Name.

— *Abram J. Ryan.*

JOHN Merton, the course of whose financial affairs had thus far run smooth, happened about this period to become entangled in an unlucky speculation. Often of an evening would his wife await for hours beyond his ordinary time of returning before he came home, jaded and taciturn. Instead of accompanying her to the various, gay assemblages of society, at which they were both so welcome, he would plead business engagements, and absent himself till late in the night. On several of these occasions, Mrs. Merton noticed with distress, that he had sought solace in stimulants.

Never had she spoken a reproachful word to him; and so she trembled in silent horror, fearing that this perhaps was but the shadow of the dark days to come. Was John, the cultured society man, the noble, high-souled gentleman, the loving husband — was *he* to court the demon of the glass? The thought was dreadful; and, as she sat by the fire-side alone, and gazed into the crackling coals, dreadful pictures of broken household idols, blighted hopes, and life-long sorrows would project themselves in weird, elfin shapes among the glowing embers, or dance ghastly, vague, and fantastical upon the walls. Her infidel authors were thrown aside; and to divert her attention from saddening thoughts, she would talk for hours to Ada; but the pure girl's holy aspirations were beyond the ken of one who had made a heaven of baser and earthier materials.

She was sitting, one evening, with Ada beside her, when the child, after looking for some time in silence at the fire, suddenly said:

“Mamma, do you see any pictures in the fire?”

“Yes, darling,” answered the mother, with a little shiver, “dreadful, horrible pictures.”

“Horrible!” repeated Ada, with a look so dreamy and withal so quaint and old-fashioned, as to cause Mrs. Merton to start. “Now that’s queer,” she went on in a musing tone, and with an expression strange in one of her years; “I see nothing but beautiful pictures. There now, I’ve been looking for five minutes at the Sacred Heart of Jesus. And it’s so real, I can see the Heart just as plain! and the flames of His great love coming from it, and burning O, ever so brightly; and I was thinking, mamma, how happy that good Nun must have felt who used to see our Lord’s real Heart. Tell me, now, mamma, do you love the Sacred Heart?”

The miserable lady of fashion hardly knew what answer to make. She, who could with dexterity turn off the polished compliments of the most polished, who could converse with learned men on learned matters, was time and again, as at the present moment, abashed and perplexed by

the innocence and simplicity of her daughter's radiant spirit.

“My love is not so great as yours, Ada.”

“Well, mamma, I'm going to put my picture of the Sacred Heart in your room. And when you see it so often in the day, I'm sure you will come to love that Heart which has loved us so much.” And, in pursuance of this design, Ada tripped out of the room, returning in a few moments with the picture from her dear shrine. Her mother, in the meantime, sat gazing gloomily at the coals, wondering where John was now passing the hours; fearing for the condition in which he should come home; imagining a thousand frightful accidents.

Poor woman! yours is no uncommon misery. Throughout the length and breadth of our fair land there are thousands of wives, who daily wait in fear for him whose returning step was once a song of joy to their hearts. Their husbands, once good and true, have taken to drinking. Little do they know, miserable men, what hidden tears, what agonizing watches, what pitiful prayers their recklessness entails; little do

they know with what care the mother keeps her children aloof so as not to see the shame of him who should be their pride and proudest boast. God pardon you, Christian husbands, you who come home to a once happy family with muddled brains; who cause the boy to blush and the girl to weep for their father; and who make the tender hearts of God's noble women bleed with a bitterness all the more inconsolable, that they are powerless to stay the evil.

Ada, while placing the picture upon the mantlepiece, could not but notice the sadness of her mother.

"What is the matter, dear mamma? Don't you love me at all any more? You look so sad, and seem to be so sorry about something. Do I tire you, mamma?"

"You tire me, darling!" cried Mrs. Merton drawing the child to her, and embracing her as though fearful of losing her only treasure; "I love you more than everything in the world, and could not live without you. Indeed I am not sad on your account. You are the one sure happiness that I can count upon. It is thinking of others that saddens me."

“Well, mamma, just to keep you from thinking of sad things, I’ll sing you a song.”

“A song! Why, Ada, I didn’t know you could sing.”

“And I didn’t want you to know it,” cried Ada, clapping her hands with delight at the pleasant surprise she had created. “It is my first song, mamma, and I learned it just to please you.” And Ada seating herself at the piano, struck a few chords, and, with a voice so sweet and touching, that the poet whose words she used would have declared the singing quite in keeping with his own beautiful verses, sang the following stanzas:—

ST. AGNES’ EVE.

Deep on the convent-roof the snows
Are sparkling to the moon;
My breath to heaven like vapor goes;
May my soul follow soon!
The shadows of the convent-towers
Slant down the snowy sward,
Still creeping with the creeping hours
That lead me to my Lord;
Make Thou my spirit pure and clear
As are the frosty skies,
Or this first snow-drop of the year
That in my bosom lies.

As these white robes are soiled and dark,
 To yonder shining ground ;
As this pale taper's earthly spark,
 To yonder argent round ;
So shows my soul before the Lamb,
 My spirit before Thee ;
So in my earthly house I am,
 To that I hope to be,
Break up the heavens, O Lord ! and far,
 Thro' all yon starlight keen,
Draw me, thy bride, a glittering star,
 In raiment white and clean.

He lifts me to the golden doors ;
 The flashes come and go ;
All heaven bursts her starry floors,
 And strews her lights below,
And deepens on and up ! the gates
 Roll back, and far within
For me the Heavenly Bridegroom waits,
 To make me pure of sin,
The sabbaths of Eternity,
 One sabbath deep and wide —
A light upon the shining sea —
 The Bridegroom with his bride.

— *Tennyson.*

Had there existed a little child in the golden days of primitive innocence, she would have sung in some such manner. There was something more than delightful music in the clear, sweet voice of the singer ; there breathed through every note, as though it were its complement, the sacred love of a

spotless heart, a heart burning to be united with the Spouse. As Ada ceased singing, the mother bent down and kissed her.

“Darling,” she said, while tears moistened her eyes, “your voice recalls the happy, happy time of long ago, the time when I was young and simple like yourself. But now I know so much more—and I’m sorry I know it. And yet what have I gained by my knowledge? Even now I would part with it all for but one sweet hour of old times.—But what nonsense I am talking,” and Mrs. Merton gave forth the dismal, dead echo of merriment—a forced laugh. “It is old feelings returning in spite of surer knowledge. Ada, when you were——”

A slight noise at the hall-door arrested her attention; and divining, with the quick instinct of a woman, who was entering and *how* he was entering, she turned crimson. “Ada,” she whispered, “steal quietly to bed: it is your father, who is annoyed about business matters, and he may be vexed at seeing you up so late.”

Something in her mother’s manner, rather than the words, caused Ada to depart without requesting the customary good-night

kiss; and scarcely had she left the room, when Mr. Merton came up the stairs tramping heavily. The worst fears of his wife were realized. His eyes were inflamed; his face discolored; blood was on his shirt, and his clothes were torn, as though he had been engaged in a violent struggle.

Mrs. Merton could scarcely repress a cry of terror.

“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” he said, in a tone intended to be reassuring, although in truth, it had a stern, hard ring, as if it came from a breast that enclosed a chaos of violent passions. “Don’t be afraid, I—I’m all right. But what’s *that?*” and as his eye caught the picture of the Sacred Heart, all the passions within seemed to awake for action.

“Ada’s picture of the Sacred Heart,” faltered Mrs. Merton.

With a dreadful oath, the man seized it, crushed it in his hands, threw it on the ground, spat on it, stamped on it; then burst into a paroxysm of invective against all that is sacred. And as he went from one blasphemy to another, an account of his long absence was supplied in snatches.

He had lost fifteen thousand dollars that day; he had been basely swindled out of it by a smooth-tongued, oily-faced swindler. But he had settled the fellow with his good arms; swindlers would now know what it was to cheat a gentleman. He finished with another fearful outburst of profanity, while his horrified wife, checking not without effort an impulse to give way to tears, stood by in silence, asking herself was this the beginning of the end.

Meanwhile, Ada, happily unconscious of the dreadful scene, was praying for the drunken father and the weeping mother. Doubtless, glorious angels hovered about her. There was blasphemy in the next room; but in this world sanctity and sin are next door neighbors, though morally they are worlds apart.



CHAPTER VII.

The gladsome singing birds of spring,
The buds upon the tree,
The sunbeams gay and brightning,
No more bring joy to me.

— *Anon.*

I will a round unvarnished tale deliver.

— *Shakspeare.*

IT was Palm Sunday, and the sun, seemingly impressed with the idea that Spring, who had long been at odds with Winter, had at length obtained her brief sceptre over the year, shone down bright and genial into the sitting-room of Mr. Merton's dwelling, lingering about the lady of the house, as if importuning her to awaken to all the newborn life and beauty of nature. But although the gay sunbeams danced their quickest measure in and out among the furniture, and upon the walls, where they seemed to play a lively game of peek-a-boo with the pictures; although an innocent little bird outside, yielding to appearances, carolled out loud and bold, defying, with

bird-like gentleness, hoary winter with all his frost and snow; although five or six tiny buds on a bush in full view of the sitting room nodded complacently in answer to the vernal breeze; although, in short, all things that spoke to the eye and ear were preaching the same joyous text to the lonely Mrs. Merton, her spirit was unconscious of them all. Her mind was agitated by a thousand fears. Truly, her sun of happiness seemed to be upon the downward slope. For the first time since the day of her marriage, Mr. Merton had left her side on Sunday, the day of rest. On rising in the morning he had shown signs of impatience, peevishness, almost of anger. More of his money, he said, was in jeopardy: and even on *that* day he must give all his attention to business.

It is a strange thing—and how often do facts show its truth — that men, when, after a long career of prosperity, they come to face serious trouble, will almost invariably take to drink; unless, indeed, they are accustomed to lay all their burdens before the loving King of Sorrows, who had himself become a man of sorrows for their sake.

Ada, too, was absent, attending High Mass at the Rock Church; and Mrs. Merton in her loneliness felt a twinge of jealousy against that God who could draw her child, even for an hour, from her bosom.

“In times long since gone,” she thought, “my heart in its petty trials and miseries could find a sweet, consoling refuge in prayer. But alas! where shall I now turn. Who shall sweeten my yoke, and lighten my burden? Ah, if there only were a living God beyond man! If there only were some great, glorious spirit who loved me, and had power to help me. But no; my husband, Ada—these are the loves in which my heart must ever endure. And yet, John is giving me so much trouble. He who once was so devoted, so kind, so affectionate, so cheering, is now changing to a ——” Her mind refused to dwell longer on the prospect, and with a sigh she resumed the reading of a novel that lay upon the table.

She was not a little surprised, when, of a sudden, Maggie stalked into the room, her round, red, good-natured face looking for the nonce very stern. Time was when Maggie could count upon being the sympa-

thetic hearer and confidante of all Mrs. Merton's troubles; but the last year had slowly, almost imperceptibly separated them by a wide barrier. As she entered the room, it was evident from her compressed lips, and from the general awkwardness of her movements that she had come upon some matter of importance. Mrs. Merton laid aside the book, and glanced inquiringly at Maggie, who, instead of announcing her errand, coughed, put one foot forward, then the other; finally, with a second cough, she wiped her face on her apron, and with a quick, jerky movement readjusted her whole position.

"Well, Maggie," said Mrs. Merton with a smile of encouragement—how sad a smile to what it once was! "You seem to be in trouble."

These words offered an outlet for the torrent of Maggie's eloquence.

"Lord forgive you, Mary Merton; but I *am* in trouble, and all to your account. Mary Merton, I've been with you since you was a little girl—and a sweet, cheerful angel you was—being the pride and joy of your father and mother, who were such

fools (may they rest in peace! amen) as to send you off to a gallivantin' academy, where they taught you to use your feet much better than your catechism. I've been with you as a poor servant girl — and nobody dasen't deny it, — and I have loved you to that, that I would do anything for you and yours. There was a time, too — tut! tut! tut! — when you would speak to me from your heart, as you once did w-wh-when I was your darling n-n-nurse, and you used to cry on my bosom." Maggie almost broke down at this point, but by a strong effort she forced back her feelings, and went on more severely than before. "There was a time, Mary Merton, when you went to the same dear, old church with myself, and partook of the same bread of life as myself, — and now what are you?" Here Maggie folded her arms, and looked her mistress boldly in the face.

The miserable lady, at any other time, might have responded to this harangue with decision; now she was so dispirited that, burying her face in her hands, she answered in a voice of entreaty rather than of command; —

“Maggie, Maggie, I am unhappy and wretched to day. Leave me to myself; go, now, leave the room.”

“God forgive me Ma’am, if I’m saying wrong,” answered Maggie without changing her position in the least, “but leave this room I shall not, unless you take me by the neck, and shove me out—and I’d like to see anybody try that. Yes, Mary Merton, you may discharge me—Lord knows it would break my heart to be parted from you and Ada—but have my say out here and now I will, though it rains pitch-forks and cats and dogs all the time.”

Throughout this fugue of rhetoric there was apparent, like a harmonizing chord, deep, honest, homely love. The mistress, too dispirited for petty anger, and yet half pleased at the affection displayed, told Maggie to go on.

“Indeed, Ma’am, I will do that same, though the dead should raise. You are unhappy, Mrs. Merton, and you know it; and, what is more, you have given up our holy mother, the Church——”

“Who told you that?” cried Mrs. Merton, springing to her feet, her eyes glowing with

excitement. Her apostasy she had held to be a secret between herself and her husband.

“Nobody told me, Mary Merton; but I know it, and have known that same for weeks.”

“Does Ada know it?” broke in the lady almost fiercely.

“Thank God, Mary Merton, her pure, suffering little heart has not that grief. But I tell you, Mary Merton,” — here Maggie took a step forward, and as she spoke, her voice grew in dignity and earnestness — “But I tell you, Mary Merton, you may scold me, you may discharge me, if you will; but I tell you, Mary Merton, that God will not wait long. The very holiness of your saintly child calls out to God against this wretched family; and the day will come, and not very far off too, for it takes no prophet to see that, when Ada will find out your unbelief. O Mary Merton! Mary Merton! come back before it is too late.”

Was this a warning from heaven? Were the passionate words of an unlettered servant-maid the voice of God? Often, indeed, the Creator makes use of the simple ones of this earth to confound the strong. But as

these thoughts rose in Mrs. Merton's mind, she quickly banished them as so many evidences of weak nerves; blinded by worldliness, her mind would allow no idea of a God beyond that of the God of pleasures. Maggie's words had fallen upon stony ground, and in thorny places. The mental conflict lasted but for a few moments; and still Maggie, with an intuition strengthened by love, perceived that her words met with no response, and yielding to the warmth of her affectionate disappointment she began sobbing bitterly.

"Maggie, Maggie!" cried the lady, with a look of agony that Maggie never forgot, "don't, — *don't* cry before me; I have trouble enough already.

"Y-y-you have, Ma'am," answered Maggie in a burst of sobs, "and p-p-p-pray G-God you-you may not have more." With this invocation the maid hastened from the room to give full vent to her grief in private, leaving the unhappy lady to shake off the painful feelings thus awakened by burying her thoughts in the intricate plot of the tale at hand. But even as she read, that one sentence seemed to ring in her ears like the

voice of a troubled spirit; — “O Mary Merton, Mary Merton! come back, come back, before it is too late.”



CHAPTER VIII.

O thou invisible spirit of wine! if thou
hast no name to be known by, let us
call thee devil!

— *Shakespeare.*

SLOWLY did the hours of that dreary Palm Sunday pass away, bringing in their train nothing but bitter thoughts, and depressing qualms to the lonesome lady. At noon, Ada returned, and her presence in some degree dissipated the gloom; but the quarters even then moved slowly on for *one* foreboding heart, and when two o'clock, the appointed dinner hour, had come, the head of the family was still expected.

There are a thousand natural charms, which have a hallowing influence upon Sunday. On that day, home is more home, and life is more a thing of love, and less a matter of business: on that day, worldly cares are laid aside, and loved ones draw nearer one another, endeavoring to show by the genial smile and the fond word, that the money-buzz of traffic is stilled for the time

being, and that the high and the holy chords of the heart respond to the same gentle influences as hallow the dawn of life. Mrs. Merton had known these charms for many years; but at last they all seemed to be rudely dispelled. Every footstep without, drew her to the window; but each time, she returned with deepened disappointment. Ada's eyes filled with tears of sympathy as she noticed her mother's growing depression.

"Come, mamma," she said, "you're getting so troubled: let us not think of papa; and just as soon as we forgot all about expecting him, he'll be sure to come. Suppose I sing to you, mamma."

"Yes, Ada, sing about Agnes again."

As if to confirm her words, Ada had not fairly begun the tender monologue, when the hall door moved upon its hinges. Mrs. Merton's anxious ear caught the sound immediately, and, without interrupting Ada, she hastened to greet her husband. One glance sufficed to show her that he was irritated, that he had been drinking.

He was far from being drunk: the convenient, gentlemanly, varnishing title "tipsy" could, perhaps, be applied to him. As

the wife's smile of greeting died away, the look of pain which superseded it was not unperceived by her husband. His faculties, though not in their normal condition, were not so dulled but that he could discern her suspicion. It galled him to think that his wife feared he was in no condition to be seen by Ada; and he resolved on the spot that, by force of will-power, he would not only refrain from doing or saying anything foolish, but comport himself with such dignity and severity as would show to what an extent he had been misjudged.

"Well, Mary," he said as he placed his hat on the rack, and took a furtive view of himself in the glass attached thereto, "is the dinner ready?"

"Yes, John: it has been long waiting for you. Come, let us go to the dining-room."

Just then Ada appeared, kissed her father, and the three proceeded to dinner. As Mrs. Merton entered the dining-hall, she made Maggie a hasty sign to remove the claret from the table. But her husband, whose feelings of vexation had made him unusually vigilant, noticed the gesture; and as Maggie bore away the wine, his brow darkened, and he

determined to show Mrs. Merton that he was not to be dealt with as a child. Therefore, appearing not to notice what had taken place, he seated himself at the table, and for some time kept silence. Then raising his eyes, he let them wander around, as if in search of something, till finally they rested on the face of his wife.

"Mary," he said, "is there no wine in the house?"

"Yes, dear," she faltered, "but you look so worn, John, and so jaded that I thought you might prefer a good cup of tea."

"I want a bottle of claret."

"Very good, John," answered his wife in her most winning manner, "but you'll wait till after dinner—to oblige me. And then I'll take a little myself with you."

"Maggie," he said, totally ignoring his wife's appeal, "bring the wine."

On the bottle's being brought, he filled and emptied a glass, and, seeing the visible annoyance of his wife, he deliberately drank down another. For some time after this there was a dead silence. At length Ada, wondering what could make her father so dull, took upon herself to start a subject.

"Papa," she said with a smile that seemed to have grown in loveliness as had its owner in sanctity, "it's only one week."

"What's only one week?"

"Before my first Communion, papa."

The guileless child little knew the storm she was creating. Even in his soberest moments, Mr. Merton found it difficult to refrain from scoffing at her spiritual views; but now, in his half maudlin condition, he felt very clearly that it was his bounden duty to give Ada a few practical instructions in modern ethics.

"Only one week before your first Communion, eh?" and as Mr. Merton spoke these words in a husky tone, he laid down his knife and fork and, in endeavoring to preserve a clear-headed appearance, cast a look of great severity upon his daughter.

"Yes, papa," said Ada timidly, abashed by her father's demeanor.

"Ada," he continued in a solemn tone, "look me in the face." The poor child in her turn laid down her knife and fork, and in some astonishment obeyed his injunction; while the miserable wife, who had vainly been making him signs to discontinue,

now almost wished that the earth would open beneath her feet.

“What’s the matter, papa?” asked Ada, for the first time in her life affrighted by her father’s look.

“Matter!” he returned with a scowl worthy of Hepzibah Pyncheon; “do you see anything the matter with me?”

Ada was too astonished to reply.

“Now, Ada,” he continued, “I want you to listen to me. Haven’t I always given you lots of pretty things — dresses and money and — and what not?”

“Yes, papa.”

“And haven’t I always been a good, kind papa to you?”

“Indeed, you have, papa.”

“And yet, you are always hurting my feelings — your own papa’s feeling. You are always speaking of things I don’t like. Why down on Change men do everything to please your papa, because they know he is rich, and powerful and — and —”

“John!” interrupted his wife in a whisper full of piteous appeal.

“And honorable,” he continued without

noticing the interruption. "*They* never say anything to hurt his feelings."

"Why, papa, I hope you don't think that I try to hurt your feelings. I wouldn't do so for anything."

"But you have. Why do you speak of first Communion to me. Can't you talk about—eh—more refined things than that. In fact, I think, Mary, we had better take her away from that convent: she is being trained there to hate her father and mother."

Ada's eyes filled with tears at this imputation; Mrs. Merton fixed an imploring look upon her husband.

"John," she said "this is Sunday. Let us leave all this till to-morrow."

"I tell you, Mary," answered the maudlin father, bringing his fist down so forcibly on the table that his wine glass was upset, "I tell you, Mary, there's no time like the present. Ada, my child, to-morrow I will take you with me to find some better school."

The poor girl was now sobbing bitterly. Was this the father who heretofore had never spoken to her but with love and kindness? And her mamma was hurt too, for

she was crying, silently indeed, but with no less bitterness for all that.

With an effort, Mrs. Merton suppressed her feelings, and, in a tone intended to divert her husband, again addressed him.

“Now, dear John, you know I will not consent to that. You must remember that I too am a Catholic, though not near so good a one as my darling, and I must insist upon Ada’s being educated in a Catholic school.”

“Mary,” he answered, “it’s no use deceiving Ada any longer. To us there is nothing higher, nothing more sacred than truth, plain and unvarnished. The cat *will* out of the bag; and I feel it my duty to tell A—”

“John, John” almost shrieked his wife, “for the sake of all you love say no more—you are not yourself.”

“I will say more,” he answered doggedly; “Mary, out with the truth and tell the child that this twelvemonth you have given up all belief in God, and that—”

He never finished his words. A low, sad moan (such a moan as comes from the depths of blighting disappointment) froze

his very soul, and as he started in horror from his seat, he saw Ada lying senseless in her mother's arms.

Could Mr. Merton believe his eyes? The terrible fruits of his folly sobered him instantly; he rushed forward towards his fainting child; but the face of an angry woman stayed his progress. She was loosening Ada's dress, while Maggie bathed her face. Mr. Merton standing mid-way in the room tore his hair.

"O, what have I done! what have I done!" he cried.

His words in his wife's ears were as fuel to the flame. She gave Ada over to Maggie, and turning on him drew herself up like a queen passing sentence on a low traitor.

"What have you done!" she repeated with blazing eyes, "you have taken the notion of God from your wife; you have tried to take it from her daughter; and into the place that God once held in this house, you have introduced the demon of drink."

Turning from him as though he were unworthy the look of bitter scorn which rested upon her countenance, she addressed herself to the child with all a tender mother's

love. "Speak to me, Ada; darling, darling child, speak to me."

"Mrs. Merton, dear, be calm," said Maggie, "Ada will be all right in a moment. There, now, she opens her eyes."

"Do you know me, darling?" cried the mother laying her cheek beside that of her child.

"Yes, mamma," said Ada faintly.

The shame-faced father advancing caught her hand. "Ada," he cried, "forgive me."

But the child again relapsed; and as Mrs. Merton gazed upon her pallid face that one supplication returned to her mind, like the burden of a song;—

"O Mary Merton, Mary Merton come back, come back, before it is too late."



CHAPTER IX.

Lo as a dove when up she springs
To bear thro' Heaven a tale of woe,
Some dolorous message knit below
The wild pulsation of her wings;
Like her I go. — *Tennyson.*

THE day that had brought so much sorrow to Ada was at its close. She was alone in her room thinking sadly of her parents' condition; and as she knelt at the foot of the cross her heart put itself into the words she breathed for father and mother; praying that they might come to the knowledge of the one, true God, "and of Jesus Christ, whom He had sent."

Ada was by no means of a despondent disposition. She was thrice happy; happy by nature, happy by grace, happy by innocence. But happiness is not opposed to zeal, and in one matter was concentrated all the earnestness of her soul; and that one matter was the honor of Jesus. She not only had faith, but it was a strong, earnest, wholesome faith; a faith that would endure wind and

storm. Nor is it at all strange to find this virtue in one so young; for, to use the words of Cardinal Manning, "The mind of a little child is larger and more expanded for the conception of revealed truth, than the minds of philosophers and sceptics, who narrow their understandings with unreasonable and pertinacious doubt."

Ada, in her present depressed state, naturally thought of the many saints, who had been compelled to suffer so much for God; and as St. Agnes, St. Catharine, St. Cecilia, and those other heroic virgins of old suggested themselves to her mind her heart grew brave, and she thanked her Saviour that she too was suffering something for His sake. And yet the bitter tears would crowd her eyes, to think that her mother was in danger of never seeing the good God.

"What can I do?" she thought; "what ought I to do?"

Her eyes wandered about the room, till their gaze was fixed upon the picture of the Blessed Virgin. And the loving face of that heavenly mother seemed so compassionate, so consoling, that she dwelt upon it for many moments. Suddenly her tearful

face brightened. Why might she not write to her dear mother? St. Stanislaus had done so, and he was a great saint.

“Yes,” she thought, “the Blessed Virgin is the Consoler of the Afflicted, the Mother of Sorrows; and I *know* that she loves me very much.” The child was not long in deciding; then going to her desk, she wrote, in all the love and confidence which only an innocent child can possess, the following letter:—

Dear Mother Mary:

I am one of your little girls in St. Louis. I am just about ten, dear mother Mary, and I am trying as well as I can to be very good, and never offend your Son. I am in the first Communion class and I am so anxious to make a very good one. I am not at all afraid; for I know that our dear Saviour used to love children when He was on earth; and then He was so kind. And then he put his hands on them and caressed them, too; so I am not at all afraid.

I want to tell you in this letter, dear mother Mary, how much I love you. But I want to ask a present, too; at least I want

you to ask your dear Son to grant me this present; for I know He will not say no to such a good mother as you. My heart is very sad to-night, dear mother Mary; I have often cried because that my father does not believe in God, and I have cried over and over again on that account. When papa said at dinner to-day that mamma did not believe in God, I felt such a sharp pain, and then I didn't know anything, till I woke up and was lying on my bed, and dear mamma, whom I love ever so much, crying over me, and asking me to speak to her. And when I looked at her, she seemed so glad, and came and kissed me over and over, as if she had not seen me for a long time. And then, dear mother Mary, when I asked her if she believed in God, she cried and only kissed me. Maggie was in the room, and she was crying too. Then mamma went out of the room, and in a few minutes came back with papa, who looked so sad, and told me I could go to the convent as long as I like, and he said he would get me the nicest white dress in the city for first Communion. I am glad of all that; but I love mamma so, and yet, dear mother Mary, she

doesn't believe in you, nor in God, nor in the beautiful angels, that I often see in my dreams, and hear talk to me. O, won't you please pray for her? and for my father? Tell your dear Son that I love them ever so much and that I would die for them. I am only a little girl, and I am not of much use in this big world; and if I knew papa and mamma would become Catholics, I would be glad to die, and see your blessed face, and live with angels and saints.

So, dear Mother Mary, if you convert my parents, I will be so happy. And I am willing to die. I hope you will like what I say in this letter, and I hope you will not mind the mistakes of a little girl.

Your loving child,

ADA MERTON.

Carefully folding the letter, Ada placed it in her bosom, so that it might be with her night and day, until her petition was heard. She was about to resume her position at her *prie-dieu*, when Maggie's voice was heard outside;—

“May I come in, my darling.”

“Certainly, Maggie, I am glad you are come.”

Maggie entered the room, and seeing at a glance that Ada had been weeping, she took the child in her lap and for some time stroked the little face in silence.

“Well, Maggie, I feel better now.”

“Are you, alannah? Well, I’m glad to hear it this blessed night.”

“Don’t you think we can bring mamma back to believe in God, Maggie?” continued the child.

“Of course, we can,” Maggie replied loudly and boldly; though she added under her breath, “It’s a dreadful lie:—Why, our Lord says that if two meet together in His name and agree on asking Him something, He will grant it; and now, Ada, you and me will pray for the Grand Mogul—your father, God forgive me that I should be losing my patience—and your mamma to get common sense, and to believe in God; and we’ll be heard; and who’ll say that we won’t?”

“Very well, Maggie; and I’ll get Sister Felicitas to pray with us, too.”

“Do, honey. It’s just the thing. That Sister is a jewel, she’s so modest and gentle that I get bashful-like before her, which

very seldom happens to me, seeing as I don't come of a bashful family, having two brothers as were the bravest in Ireland; God save her and keep her green for ever!"

"Indeed, I know you are brave, Maggie," said Ada smiling.

"Well I'll not say no, though it isn't me as should say it," answered Maggie with a pleased air, "but if the Turk—if your father doesn't be improving, I'll talk to him like—like a Dutch uncle; and now, my dear, it is time for you to go to bed; but don't be down-hearted; never say die; there's as many fish in the sea as ever came out of it. Good-night." and with these first principles on her lips Maggie made her adieu.

Putting out the light, Ada again knelt beside the crucifix, praying in all earnestness for her parents. Long did the weak child hold her arms extended in the form of a cross; so long, that from sheer exhaustion they fell at her side. What a power is prayer coming from a pure heart; it constrains, as it were, the very will of the all-powerful God. And was Ada's supplication to be unheeded?

She heard not the opening of the door,

so absorbed was she in prayer; she saw not Mrs. Merton gazing on her in amazement. The mother advanced, unperceived, and caught the child to her bosom.

“Darling, why are you up so late? I thought you were in bed.”

“I was praying for you, mamma,” was Ada’s simple answer.

“But you are too weak, my child, to stay up so late, and besides, little girls need more rest. Come, darling, let me help you to bed.”

Even after Ada had been snugly wrapped up, the mother hung over the slight form, her arms around the child’s neck.

“Ada,” she asked, with some hesitation and after a long pause, “do you still love me as much as before?”

“More, mamma, and I’ll never stop praying for you, till you believe in God.”

“That will never—” here Mrs. Merton checked herself, “I fear it will be a long time, but it may come. Now, my child, go to sleep.”

The mother with one arm still about her daughter, sang a cradle song which Ada well knew and soon the child was sleeping peace-

fully. But for hours afterwards Mrs. Merton gazed upon that pure lovely face.

Frequently would she kiss the pale cheek; and at times a look of pain (the outward expression of an indefinable presentiment) would cross her features. Did the fond, foolish, unhappy mother see the veil of futurity rent asunder? Did she discern even a shadow of wrath to come?



CHAPTER X.

Glory to God, who so the world hath framed,
That in all places children more abound
Than they by whom humanity is shamed.

— *Aubrey De Vere.*

He saddens ; all the magic light
Dies off at once from bower and hall,
And all the place is dark, and all
The chambers emptied of delight.

— *Tennyson.*

THE nearer the longed-for day of her first Communion approached, the more eager grew Ada's desire for the coming of her only Love.

The hallowing mantle of some saint appeared to have fallen upon her ; and, as she threaded the streets on her way to school, many a hardened man would turn to look upon her pure face, and would feel instinctively a vague, newly awakening regret for the days, when his heart was less grovelling, less of the earth, and knew something of that peace which the proud, rich world has never given.

The dark shadow of infidelity which came

between her and father and mother did not utterly take away her joy; true, her earthly love lay bleeding; but she was one of those "thrice-blessed, whose loves in higher loves endure." And she felt so confident too that her Divine Visitor would surely grant her parents' conversion.

None of her schoolmates, when they saw the tastily-dressed, smiling, gentle girl, reckoned for a moment that she bore within her bosom a weight of care, which few Catholic children — thank God — ever have to experience.

It was the last Thursday that preceded the great morning. Ada was standing in the school-ground among a knot of little girls.

"Only three days more!" said one, "My! doesn't it seem awful strange?"

"Strange!" cried another; "I am so anxious for the day to come; and mamma has made me — O! just the *love-li-est* white dress!" The little miss invested her whole stock of vigor in that one adjective.

"I'm going to have something more nicer than that," broke in the smallest of the group. "My ma is going to get me the

sweetest crown of roses for my head. What are you going to have, Ada?"

"Papa and mamma are getting me a very nice dress," Ada answered.

"And your mamma prays for you all the time? and says the beads with you every night, doesn't she?" pursued the interrogator.

No one that looked on Ada's tranquil countenance could have had the faintest suspicion of the heart-sickness she felt at these questions.

"Does your mother pray for you?" she asked, thus turning off the question.

"Does she!" answered the other, "why that's just *no name for it*, as my brother Tom says — brother Tom does use such horrid slang — she seems so anxious for me to be a good girl, and make a very good Communion. And then she tells the sweetest stories about first Communion, they'd make you cry to hear them." The child had scarcely entered fairly upon her narration, when all the little girls began speaking simultaneously, except Ada, who being the only listener became at once the victim of six different accounts, interesting, no doubt,

of "mamma's" great interest in the great day. Their babble created a sense of void in poor Ada's heart; much as she loved her mother, she could never receive that sympathy which only a devout mother can give.

When the bell rang for the ending of recess, all the children hurried away in a great flutter to the room where they were being prepared. It was the day appointed for distributing the prizes to those in the Communion class who had been distinguished for exemplary conduct. No one doubted who was to be the winner of the first prize; and when Ada Merton was read out for it, fifty little hands and as many joyous eyes were unanimous in testifying their owners' approbation. Ada's countenance flushed with pleasure, as with a smile and a bow she received from the hands of Sister Felicitas a beautifully bound volume. She knew that her mother was always proud when her little girl excelled in anything — even in religion.

As Bob met her at the school door in the afternoon, he noted her pleased expression.

"Well, missy Ada," he began, "you does

look happy dis afternoon: what is you glad about?"

Ada told him of her prize, showing the book.

"You'se a great book-bible-maniac," here Bob coughed to hide his conscious triumph. "Bible-maniac" was the proudest word graven on the tablets of his memory, and it was seldom he had an opportunity of astonishing his auditors by its ponderous sound. "Yes, missy Ada," he repeated "you'se a great book bible-maniac."

"What is a book bible-maniac, Bob?" asked his amused charge.

"The tahm book bible-maniac," answered Bob with dignity, "am a Greek suppression, and means some one what's gone on books. But," he continued laying aside his dignity, and beaming with smiles, "I'se happy too, missy Ada, dis hyar day."

"I thought something nice had happened to you. Has papa raised your wages?"

"Lor' bress you, missy, I doesn't caeh fo' wages. 'De wages ob sin am deff.'" Bob stopped to chuckle over the apt quotation, and added, "Missy, I'se jes' done had a glorious time."

“Why what have you been doing? Are you ready soon to be baptized?”

“You’s red hot, missy;; almos’ guessed it. I’s done made my fust ’fession.”

“Did you!” cried Ada with brightening eyes; “I’m so very, very glad. And don’t you feel happy?”

“As, as a big sun flowah,” was the genial reply.

“That’s good; and when you are baptized you will be fit to go straight to heaven, if you were to die.”

“I ’spose I would. I nebbah yet felt so light an’ gay; an’ I made de pries’ laugh, too.”

“You did! How was that, Bob?”

“You see, he says to me when he opened dem chinks in de ’fession box, ‘My chile, how long sence you last ’fession?’ an’ he didn’t look at me at all. So as I didn’t want decebe him, I says ‘ef you look through these heah chinks, father, you’ll see dat I’s no chile; I’seneah forty-five yeahs ole, an I’s nebbah been to ’fession befoah. I’s a new controvert, *I* is,’ an den he smile, an’ tole me a lot o’ nice sayins, an’ I tole him all about mysef, an’ nex’ Sunday when you

makes youah fust Communion, I'se to be baptized."

"It will be a very happy day for both of us," said Ada in high delight at Bob's good sentiments. "But here we are home already, and there is mamma waiting for me on the steps."

Mrs. Merton's face relaxed from the expression of sadness that of late had been becoming habitual to it, as Ada showed her the prize.

"So it's for virtue, Ada," she said, as they proceeded towards the sitting-room." "Well, I think you deserve it. You remind me of those child-saints I used to read of, when I was a girl like yourself."

"Ah, mamma," said Ada sadly, "you never read such books now."

"No, my child; I have no time for such trifles."

"Trifles!" cried the child, her face glowing with earnestness, "how can you say that? O mamma, mamma, dearest! Every morning when I look from the window, at the sun, and smell the sweet flowers, in my garden, and hear the little birds singing so, I can't help *feeling* that there's a good, great God,

who made all these pretty things for us, mamma."

"And so you count me out, do you?" chimed in Mr. Merton, who had just entered the room unperceived; "why Ada, you're an out and out little poet — only you have all the beauty of the present style of poets, without their eternal leaven of mysticism and nonsense. I think," he added taking pencil and paper from his coat, "I'll make a note of what you said, and send it on to the Century Magazine. The editors would like it I'm sure."

"O don't papa: but I know you're only joking."

"Am I though?" said the imperturbable father, "we'll see. How was that you said it? — Ah, yes (here he began writing): 'Every morning when I look out of my window —' "

"O papa, *please* don't," begged Ada with so much earnestness that the impromptu reporter threw aside his tablets, and indulged with his wife in a hearty laugh.

The room seemed to brighten for the moment (it had long been dull enough), and Mr. Merton began to talk in his former

happy, jocose manner. Ada was overjoyed at the change; and Mrs. Merton actually lost all her gloom. But a calm often precedes the storm. While the moments were still gliding merrily along, the bell was heard ringing, and presently Maggie entered the room with a telegram, which she handed her master. He tore open the envelope nervously and read its contents with gathering brows. Tearing it to pieces, and muttering a suppressed oath, he strode from the room. The astonished lady gathered up the fragments of the telegram, and, while throwing them in the fire, saw, without intending it, on one of the scraps, "*Bender's Bank fa—*." She could readily surmise his trouble; for if the Bender's Bank had closed its doors, he would be a loser of more than one half of his fortune.

It was eleven o'clock before he returned that night, and his bloodshot eyes and flushed face told their story.



CHAPTER XI.

Then out came his lady fair,
A tear into her ee ;
Says "stay at home, my own good lord,
O stay at home with me !"

— *Old Ballad.*

THERE was great excitement in the city the next morning. Men who had retired the previous night in fancied security awoke to find themselves ruined. The Bender's Bank had always enjoyed high favor with the poorer classes; and the industrious servant girl, who had been happy in a growing bank account, the clerk, who had deprived himself of countless luxuries with a view to beginning business for himself, and the simple laboring man who had laid by something for a rainy day, were at once reduced to the lowly state whence they had begun. It was a pitiful sight to see the crowd thronging the narrow street facing the bank; pale, angry creditors beating at the closed doors, some shouting madly, others proclaiming their losses to entire

strangers; others too miserable to speak: more pitiful still to note among them poor, pinched working girls, many of them weeping bitterly. Mr. Merton was a heavy loser; nearly all his cash was on deposit there; and were it not for the large amount he invested in real estate, he would have been utterly ruined. Looking to nothing beyond this world, money was to him of supreme importance; and the loss drove him almost frantic. The first pallor of dawn had scarcely thrown its dim, gray veil over the city, when he started from his bed, as though awakening from a troubled dream.

“Mary,” he said, turning upon her his wild swollen eyes, “where is the paper?”

She procured it for him; and he eagerly ran his eyes over the columns, moaning, and muttering to himself in a manner that made his wife tremble.

“John,” she faltered, “don’t make yourself so miserable: remember, my dear, that you have your wife and daughter, whom all the banks in the world couldn’t take from you. Beside you have your real estate to fall back upon. We are far, very far from being poor.”

But Merton heeded not her remarks, so absorbed was he in the account of the bank's liabilities. Suddenly, he started up in bed, clenched his hands, threw them wildly about, and uttered a blood-curling imprecation on the heads of those who had in charge the business management.

"Look at that," he shouted, when the tempest of his wrath had moderated; and he pointed to a certain paragraph.

She read:—"The affairs of the bank have been so poorly, so recklessly managed, that it seems doubtful whether its creditors will ever be able to make good two per cent. of their money. It is rumored that the cashier, who is in large part responsible, will 'lie shady' for some time to come."

In the meantime, Mr. Merton was dressing; but so wild were his actions that his wife trembled with alarm.

"Where are you going so early, my dear?" she inquired in her most winning manner. "Surely you do not intend leaving us so long before business hours."

He made no answer, but hastened to complete his toilet. Still silent, he went to the bureau; pulled out one drawer after another,

throwing drawer and contents on the floor, in search evidently of some particular article.

His wife stood by in trepidation: never before had she seen him in so furious a mood.

"Mary," he broke out suddenly, "where are my pistols?"

"O John, my love," she moaned while clasping her hands together, "what are you about to do? There is murder in your eye, dear John. No, no; you mustn't ask for them; you shall not have them."

"Very well, then: this will do," and he advanced towards the mantelpiece, whereon lay a richly-hilted dagger.

But his wife was before him, and hid it in the bosom of her dress. "No, dear John," she said turning to her baffled husband, who, furious as he was, still respected his wife, "you are carried away by passion, and may do in a moment what may occasion life-long regret."

"Let me see the dagger," he persisted.

"Not now, dearest: you shall see it some other time."

The words, "you shall see it at some other time," were uttered at random. But later on he *did* see it, and the wildness of her

features now was as nothing in comparison to the dreadful memories that were to cluster about that other time, when in an agony she made good the unwitting promise she had given, little knowing, poor woman, of its dreadful fulfillment.

“Well, Mary, I must go,” and he made to leave the room.

But she threw her arms around him, and begged with tears to know what he was about. He softened a little, and a film came over his eyes.

“Mary, my life, it is all my love for you and for Ada. I have been swindled: basely, outrageously swindled. The money that was to afford you and—and my only child all the pleasures of life, has been taken by a set of rascals. Yesterday at three o’clock, just before the bank closed I deposited in addition to what I had already there, eight thousand five hundred dollars, the proceeds of a sale of land, I had made that day; and the black-hearted scoundrel of a cashier, who knew that the bank was to close forever three minutes later—the—dastard”—here he ground his teeth, and for a moment failed of words, so great was

his wrath — “this cashier smiled pleasantly took my money and invited me with his glib tongue *to call again!* I tell you, Mary, before this day is out, I’ll have his blood!”

But she held him fast, and hung sobbing on his bosom.

“No John, promise me not to seek for him—to-day at least. Wait till to-morrow.”

“But I will seek him to-day, Mary; and either he or I will close our accounts for good.”

He struggled to get away, but his wife clung to him, speechless and sobbing. For a moment he stood infuriated, still with enough of the human in him not to offer the least violence to the woman of his love. But as his wrongs chased through his memory all gentle feelings began to leave him. He caught his wife with his strong arms, and held her as though about to throw her from him. While they were thus standing, Ada entered the room. The horrible anger on her father’s face filled her with terror; the miserable, frightened countenance of her sobbing mother inspired her with pitying love. She drew back for a moment in amazement, not knowing what course to

take; then raising her loving eyes in supplication, she said:—

“Kiss me, dear papa.”

And the strong, furious man raised his little daughter in his arms, embraced her, and burst into tears. The innocence and love of Ada had conquered him for the time.

Before he departed for town that morning, he promised his wife on his honor that nothing should tempt him to make search after the swindler.

How long and dreary was that day to Mrs. Merton. There was a time—quite recently, indeed—when her husband’s word was to her a motive of supreme confidence. But now, should he drown his sorrows with wine, what reliance could be placed on his most sacred promises? Evening came, and with it a terrific storm. The sky had been gloomy throughout the day; from early morning, the clouds, like a hostile army, had been massing themselves together in the heavens. Clad in their blackest, they lowered upon the world, and seemed preparing to make a descent upon it, as upon their most hated enemy. Towards noon, low mutterings of thunder had been heard,

which grew in distinctness as the day declined. About four of the afternoon, the wind which had been sobbing and sighing all day, arose violently, and gave forth the whistling battle-cry of the storm king; down came the rain, fiercely and pitilessly; streak after streak of lightning cast a mocking, momentary flash of light over the unnatural darkness: and the thunder almost unintermittingly rattled and crashed along the heavens.

Ada was safe at home; Mr. Merton had not yet returned. His wife stood at the window with the child, and the dark, lowering, massed clouds seemed to sink into her very soul; the heavy peals of thunder reached her foreboding heart like the moan of calamity; and the forked lightning shone before her like gleams of hatred from hostile eyes.

“Why do you shiver, mamma? are you afraid?” asked Ada noticing her mother’s affright.

“I am very nervous, darling; I feel as though the dark shadow of death were hovering above our house.”

“Death isn’t a dark shadow; for after it, we shall see the glorious God and His saints.”

“If it were only so.” sighed the poor woman. “But why is your father so late? and in such weather, too. I have been expecting him this hour.”

At that moment a terrific clap of thunder broke upon the air. Mrs. Merton had become so nervous, that at the sound she sank into a chair, and covered her face with her hands. She was called to herself by Ada’s voice.

“O look, mamma, we’re going to have visitors.”

She arose, and looking out of the window, saw a carriage in front of the house. Fearing that the unknown evil was near, she rushed from the room, and down the stairs, where she was met at the door by a gentleman.

“My husband! where is he?” she gasped, for her voice was choked by agitation.

“Be calm, madam; he is not seriously injured: he is only stunned.”

With a low, sad cry of pain, she hastened past him to the street. Already four men were lifting his helpless form out of the carriage. He was senseless, and

there was a wound on his head, from which the blood had issued and clotted upon his hair. It was a gloomy sight, the carriage black and bespattered with mud; the driver on the seat so wrapped that he looked like the shadow of death; the pelting rain falling upon the helpless body and its bearers, and the wild but beautiful lady catching the irresponsive hand of her husband. But, they hastened to tell her, he was not seriously injured. A good night's rest they assured her, would enable him to be about on the morrow.

The wretched man, as we have seen, had left the house early in the morning, and faithful to his promise had at first taken no measures to meet with the cashier. All would have gone well, had he restrained himself from liquor. But in his rage, he had imbibed freely; and in a state bordering on frenzy, chance had brought him face to face with the cashier. Words were exchanged; blows followed. So furious was the attack of the liquor-crazed man, that his apponent, through fear of losing his life, had seized a cane and struck Merton a severe blow upon the head.

The wound was not at all serious, but the tipping! This it was that weighed most heavily upon Mary Merton's heart. She began to realize that one source of her happiness was gone; that the formerly kind, and sober husband could be no longer depended on with the same, confiding, loving reliance. She sat beside her husband's bed, long after he had fallen into a heavy slumber; and her thoughts were bitter. She looked upon the pain-contracted face of Mr. Merton, and shuddered, as her consciousness told her that the old love was ebbing away surely but slowly, and rounding into the narrower forms of fear and anxiety.

Ada had long been slumbering quietly, when she was awakened by her mother's warm kisses.

"O Ada, my child," cried the mother, clasping the little girl tightly to her bosom, "you, my darling, and only you, are my happiness, my heaven, my all."



CHAPTER XII.

I've been abused, insulted, and betrayed ;
My injured honor cries aloud for vengeance
Her wounds will never close !

— *Shakespeare.*

THE next day brought back the sun bright as ever; it reawakened the stilled voices of the birds, and the light touch of the vernal breeze; it restored peace, calm and joy, to all nature — and consciousness, though not peace, to the injured man. His heart was envenomed with hatred, and his mind revolved a thousand projects for meting out punishment to his enemy adequate to the insult. But no word escaped his lips indicative of the thoughts of vengeance he was nursing. He spoke but little, and every answer that he tendered his wife's anxious inquiries fell upon her ear like the harsh sounds of some shattered musical instrument.

His proud spirit chafed at the treatment he had received. And why should he pass over an insult, why should he turn the other

cheek, since long years ago he had rejected the Prince of peace, since he had sneered at the sublime commands of Him who tells us to "love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute and calumniate us?" But bound to his bed by the cruel bonds of pain, he was powerless for the day: and at times he would gnash his teeth and groan, not for physical suffering, but for his impotency to wreak instant vengeance upon his cowardly assailant.

At length he determined upon his course of action. Dismissing his wife from the room on some shallow pretext, he hastily penned the following note to the cashier:

"SIR,

If you are a gentleman (which I have many reasons for doubting) you will meet me at two o'clock P. M. to-morrow (Sunday) in Barker's saloon west of the Fair Grounds. Bring any friend of yours along that you please. I will await you there till night, and if you fail to appear (as seems to be very probable) I will brand you as a coward, and horsewhip you on the first occasion.

JOHN MERTON."

Secretly summoning Bob, he despatched him with the missive to the cashier's residence. When Mrs. Merton returned, she felt instinctively that her husband was cherishing some new secret; but so dispirited was the humbled lady, that she dared not question him. Mr. Merton, now that he had relieved his mind on the one subject which was rankling there, suddenly became lively and gay; and to his wife's no little joy spoke cheerfully of his losses, and with consummate art, diverted all the suspicions which she previously might have formed.

It was an utterly different day to Ada; for it was the one of her final preparation for the happiest event of her life. Long after her confession, she remained before the tabernacle, praying for those of her own household, who were sitting in the shadow of death; praying that the good God might open their eyes to the brightness of eternal light; praying that in union with her they might come to recognize one God, one Faith, one Lord and Master of all. She returned home filled with beautiful thoughts of the next morning.

“Papa,” she said, “are you better this evening?”

“Why, of course. Can’t you see I’m better? I expect to go out in the yard to-morrow, and stand on my head to show you how hard it is.”

“Well, papa,” here Ada hesitated, “won’t — won’t you come along with mamma to-morrow morning, and see me make my first Communion?”

He turned uneasily in his bed.

“All the other little girls are going to have their papas, and mammas along,” Ada suggested.

“That’s a pretty strong argument,” answered the father, “but it’s so chilly in the morning. That hole in my head has created quite a draught up there.”

“Do come, John,” urged his wife, seeing that he was inclining to assent.

“Well, I’ll go; seeing that the whole family is standing out against me. But you needn’t ask me to come to church again, till I build one myself.”

Ada clapped her hands, and, bending down, kissed him tenderly.

“That’s a good, dear papa,” she said,

“and I’m going to pray so hard for you and mamma to-morrow morning, that I’m sure our Saviour will hear me.”

Mr. Merton smiled incredulously.

“I’ve heard of ‘care killing a cat,’ ” he said, “but no one ever heard of prayer even making one blink, so you may pray away Ada: it will do neither you nor us any harm.”

“But it will do you good: won’t it mamma?”

“I’m afraid not, Ada, your papa and I are too old to change our opinions so easily; even to please the darling little daughter we love so much.”

“Too old!” answered Ada with an artlessness which transcended the highest art; “why you’re not old, mamma. Sister Felicitas told me once, the day after she met you and me walking together, that you look so young, and more like my elder sister than my mother.”

“Did she?” said Mrs. Merton, not a little pleased. From that moment she felt a friendly regard for Ada’s teacher.

“Yes, mamma, and she wants to know you, and is always asking me why you don’t come and pay her a visit.”

“Well, well, I must go and see Sister Felicitas soon: she must be very nice, since my little girl can love her so much.”

“O, indeed, she is very nice: and I’m sure you’ll love her very much; and she’ll be able to tell you ever so many things about God, that will make you believe.”

Ada was now happy: she felt that a victory had been gained; that her parents were coming closer to the true faith. Resolving to push her advantages, she added, after a pause:—

“Sister Felicitas said something beautiful to us to day.”

“What was it, Ada?” asked Mrs. Merton.

“She told us that our loving Jesus enters our souls in holy Communion as into a tabernacle; and that He loves to find this tabernacle adorned with the flowers of virtue. And then she said that the flowers dearest to Jesus were the roses of love, the lilies of purity and the violets of modesty; and that as the dew brings out more perfectly the loveliness of an earthly flower, so the dew of prayer makes these heavenly flowers most grateful to His loving Heart. And so now, dear mamma, and papa, I’m going

to my room for a while to pray for this heavenly dew. Good bye, dear mamma, good bye, dear papa," and she kissed them with a loving tenderness all the greater that it seemed to be spiritualized into the highest and holiest love which poor human nature can attain.

"Ah, John," sighed the mother when Ada had left the room, "I felt just then as though, in spite of all my experience and knowledge, I was in the presence of some superior being."

"Hum," muttered John trying to resist the same conviction, "natural sensation—animal magnetism, electricity, etcetera. But," he continued with more earnestness, "she really is a wonderful child. There are preachers abounding, who could never attempt to speak in the beautiful simple way, in which she just now spoke to us. Her subject was nonsensical of course; but one could see that she really believed what she said, which is much more than can be allowed of our high salaried ministers of the day. Yes, Mary; we must take good care of her. In a few years, she will be as beautiful a young lady as this country can boast—if she live."

“Live!” echoed his wife, “my goodness, John, you can’t imagine that she will be taken from us!”

“I don’t know, Mary; but when she kissed me just now with that strange *spirituelle* look shining about her, I felt as if she were going away for a long time. — But that’s nonsense — superstition.”

“Of course,” she assented, “if a person is a little careful, death need never be considered. It is a morbid thought. Life becomes intolerable under its shadow. But, John, let us love Ada more and more, for, to adapt the beautiful comparison of Sister Felicitas, she is, indeed a rose of love.”

“Yes; but we had better tend our blossoming little flower very carefully, lest those ogres of the black veil, of which Sister Felicitas is a member, steal our rose away and leave us nothing but the thorns.”

“Have no fear, John: Ada may persist in her religion—for though it be false, I really am coming to think that it is a blessing to those who believe—but, mind me, she shall never be a nun.”



CHAPTER XIII.

The priest comes down to the railing,
Where brows are bowed in prayer ;
In the tender clasp of his fingers
A Host lies pure and fair,
And the hearts of Christ and the Christian
Meet there — and only there.

— *Abram J. Ryan.*

THE happy morning was come. Long before the ruby-tinted messengers of the sun had set his royal signet in the East, Ada was up and dressed. Never did she look more like a bright stranger from the unknown land than at the dawn of this Easter morning, as robed in spotless white she knelt before her crucifix, her very eyes, nay her whole being, the “homes of silent prayer.” Shining with “the light that never yet was seen on land or sea,” her face seemed to reflect the happiness of the blessed. A graceful and fragrant chaplet of roses, lilies and violets (suggested to her mother by the conversation of the preceding afternoon), rested like a glory on her fair hair; and, to borrow from a great author,

“she looked like a creature fresh from the hands of God.”

Not a word did she utter on her way to church; and her parents respecting, if not appreciating, her feelings, allowed her to walk before them.

“John,” whispered Mrs. Merton, as they neared the vestibule of the church, “look at the beauty of our child. Isn’t it something unearthly?”

“It *is* remarkable,” he conceded; “never saw anything like it. If there were anything in our reach that wasn’t part and parcel of the earth, I would assent to your qualifying epithet.”

And now for the first time in sixteen years, Mr. Merton, accompanied by his wife who was fast becoming a stranger too, found himself seated in a Catholic church, and looking again upon the great sacrifice of the Mass. But their carnal eyes had no sympathy for the grand mystery presented to them: Ada, and Ada alone absorbed their attention.

As the child was returning from the communion table, Mrs. Merton could hardly believe her eyes.

"John, John, look at her face," she whispered. "Do my eyes deceive me, or isn't her countenance aglow with light?"

"Bosh!" answered the husband, "she does look like the angels they talk of, but don't you know what tender sensibilities, and what a lively imagination Ada has? She thinks she's united to an impossible First Cause—that's all. Why if that man at the altar were a bogus priest, and the bread she just now received hadn't been consecrated or whatever you call it, she would have looked just the same."

It was a strange thing; and yet as Ada had turned from the railing, Mr. Merton had by a sort of instinct thrown himself upon his knees; but on remembering himself, had slipped into his seat, as though ashamed of himself. Mrs. Merton did not kneel for a moment.

On the way home the husband was in bad humor; and he went so far as to aver that he would never enter a Catholic church again—he would die first. And yet the unhappy man knew in the depths of his heart that his spleen arose from the gnawings of conscience, that his bitterness was caused

by the memory of his own happy first Communion.

Mrs. Merton, too, was sad; for she could not but confess to herself, that notwithstanding her denial of the existence of God, she might have been much happier, she should now be much more hopeful, if her faith, baseless though it were, had never been shaken.

So, when they reached their dwelling, they were in no mood for conversation; and they awaited Ada, each one busied with thoughts, better, perhaps, for each other's sakes, left unsaid. And when the child arrived, it was like the sunbeam penetrating the gloomy cell of a prison. She gaily told them all about herself and her fellow-communicants; how happy each was, and what beautiful pictures the kind Sister had given them.

"Look at mine!" she went on taking a number of pictures from her prayer-book. "Some of them are the prettiest I have ever seen. Here's Blessed Margaret Mary, and there's St. Agnes; but look at this one—all in bright colors too—it's the dear child

Jesus in a manger. Now, mamma, you must kiss it."

Ada bent an eager pair of eyes upon her mother, who with a crimson face kissed the picture.

"You must do the same, papa," continued Ada presenting it to her father.

"Why, how well that white dress becomes you," said Mr. Merton evading the point as usual. "You look like a miniature Venus rising out of the sea-foam: never did I see you looking so pleasing."

"I'm glad you like it, papa; but why don't you kiss the picture?"

"Well, it is a lovely dress, in an æsthetic point of view. Dear me, the sweetness and light are all there. You ought to live in such a dress as that always."

"I'd like to die in it papa."

"Ada, my darling," broke in the mother, her voice quivering as she spoke, "don't think of death. Never use that word. You so young, so lovely, so innocent, so talented; with all the gay pleasures of life before you! No, no darling, such subjects do not become you."

"There's not a girl in our class, mamma,"

answered Ada with heightening color, "who would not gladly die to-day. This morning I begged my dear Saviour to take my life, if that would bring you and papa to the true faith."

"I'm glad you love us so much as that," said Mr. Merton; "but" — and he smiled scornfully — "so long as you offer your life to God only, there's not any extraordinary danger of your being heard. However Ada, I want you to be more careful of your health, you are beginning to grow pale and thin. By the way, Ada, don't you fast?"

He fixed his sharp eyes upon her. She hung her head, blushed, but made no answer.

"Answer me," he commanded, with his eyes still upon her. "You are very pale, Ada. Didn't you fast yesterday?"

"Yes, papa; but it was for you and mamma. Nobody except God knew of it, till now."

Upon this admission, Mr. Merton plied question after question; and though his face grew very grave, and his wife was moved to tears, when they learned some of the austerities which Ada had been imposing on herself for their sakes, they failed to

discover one tithe of the bodily sufferings that Ada had voluntarily undergone for their sins. Ever since the day that her mother's unbelief had come to light, Ada, not sufficiently versed in asceticism to consult her confessor in such matters, had embraced austerities above her strength.

Even over what they learned, her father and mother were very serious; and at breakfast they watched her closely. But Ada had already perceived her mistake.

"You needn't watch me, papa; up to this, I didn't know any better," she said. "After this I will never fast or do anything of that sort without letting you know it."

"Had I been a fervent Catholic," thought the mother, "she would not have done such things without consulting me. Poor child! I fear that I am not all to her that a perfect mother should be."

A little after mid-day, Mr. Merton, who had been growing moodier as the time drew near to the hour appointed for meeting the cashier, called for his coat and cane.

"What! going out to-day, John?" cried his wife, a feeling of vague uneasiness creeping over her.

“Yes, Mary,” with as much lightness as he could assume, “I have a—eh—eh—a business engagement to attend to.”

With a heavy heart, she accompanied him to the hall door. She longed to give him *one* caution; but she feared his anger. Oh, if she could but muster up courage for those few words! She looked up to his face wistfully, as he turned to go; and her hopes rose as she noticed how pleasantly he smiled on her. He remarked her wistful look, and paused on the threshold.

“Well, Mary, what is it you wish to say?”

“John, dear, don’t,—O, do not drink anything.”

She never forgot the look of fury that transformed his countenance: without answering a word, he turned on his heel; but she caught his arm and clung to it.

“Don’t leave me in this fashion, John,” she cried pleadingly. The proud man with an effort restrained himself, and in that moment of hesitation, it flashed through his mind that possibly he might never return to his family.

“You are right, Mary,” he answered,

“we have never yet parted in anger, nor shall we to-day. Where is Ada?”

Ada was just descending the stairs.

“Why, papa, to-day is Sunday; and Easter Sunday too,” she said. “You musn’t leave us to-day.”

“But I must, though, so good bye, Ada,” and to the astonishment of his wife, he raised the child in his arms, and embracing her with unusual tenderness, held her to his breast for several minutes.

“Perhaps,” he was thinking, “I shall never see her again.” Then with a gesture of adieu, he closed the door, and with it he closed out all love and peace; for his mind now turned to thoughts of revenge. With a darkening brow, he made his way to the Fair Grounds, but the thought, “perhaps, I shall never see her again,” rang in his heart like a prophetic dirge. Once he was prompted to turn back; but he crushed the impulse and went on.



CHAPTER XIV.

Like one, that on a lonesome road,
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round, walks on
And turns no more his head,
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

— *Coleridge.*

TWO o'clock of that eventful Sunday afternoon arrived; but there was one opponent only at the designated meeting place. An hour passed, then another, and still no new arrival. Mr. Merton grew impatient, and strode up and down a path beside a shady grove, furious at the delay.

At length despairing of a meeting, he repaired, to relieve the monotony, to the wayside inn, and ordering a bottle of wine, seated himself at a table. Standing at the counter, were a few well-to-do looking men engaged, if one could judge by their looks, in an exciting conversation. At the entrance of the new-comer, they paused for a moment in their talk, but after surveying him, continued the interesting theme. At first, Mr.

Merton was so buried in his own thoughts, that their words fell idly upon his ear. Suddenly his face changed, and he was all attention.

“They say he’s hidden at Florissant,” said one. These were the words that brought Mr. Merton into a listening attitude.

“That’s strange,” chimed in another; “for he told me the very day after the break, that he’d stay and face the music.”

“Yes,” answered the first speaker, “but it appears that some one sent him a threatening message yesterday — blood, knives, pistols, and that sort of thing — and being uncommonly weak in the nerves, he’s run away.”

Merton concluded that they were speaking of the cashier, and so great was his excitement while listening that he unconsciously drained glass after glass. The speakers were branching off to some other subject, when he arose, walked up to them, and fixing eyes, that bespoke intense passion, upon one of the informants gasped out:—

“Sir, pardon me; did you allude to the cashier of the Bender’s Bank?”

“The same, sir” answered the man after a moment’s pause.

Without noticing the significant glances which the men exchanged, Merton abruptly left the tavern. There was no going back now. He must set out for Florissant, immediately; but it would not do to return home for his things; for his wife was already sufficiently alarmed. Walking rapidly to Easton Avenue, he took a street car, stepping off at the first livery stable it passed.

“A horse and buggy, till to morrow morning—the fastest horse you’ve got,” he said handing his card to the hostler, who upon reading it, touched his hat respectfully, and bustled off to execute the commission.

After a delay which seemed interminable, the hostler delivered the reins into his hands. Springing into the buggy impatiently, Merton gave the horse a sharp cut, and started at break-neck speed.

The astonished hostler strained his eyes after the fast receding vehicle, scratched his head, shook it, and then remarked:—

“Well, if that ere hoss comes back right side up, I’m another, *I* am. But Mr. Merton’s able to foot the damages—that’s one consolation.”

Long before he had concluded his solilo-

quy, the object of it was out of sight. On he drove spinning over the road till city houses were succeeded by suburban residences, and glimpses of woods flashed before him; on he drove till cottage, garden, and field passed like spectres before his eyes; on he drove, madly overtaking and passing other equipages, the occupants of which would often rein in their horses, and gaze wonderingly at the fine-looking gentleman, with the demon's glare in his wild eyes. The sun was low before he gained Florissant; but he thought not of this. Stopping at the first house on the outskirts of the vilage, he made enquiries for the cashier; but the inmates knew nothing of the man. At every house in the vicinity, he repeated his question only to obtain the same answer. Finally, he gained the village tavern. Its keeper, a stout man of about forty, looked at the questioner suspiciously.

“Never heern of him, before,” was his answer. There were several men in the room, listeners to the conversation. One of them stole out with Mr. Merton, and whispered to him;—

“Drive away from the inn a little, an’ I reckon I ken tell you somethin’.”

Mr. Merton drove further on, and awaited the man, a shabby looking fellow, whose countenance was by no means of a kind to inspire confidence.

“Stranger, if you want to know whar’ that man is, it must be wuth your knowin’.”

“Certainly it is,” answered Merton unconscious of the other’s drift. “Tell me quick.”

“I don’t know but what it may be wuth five dollars to you.”

“O!” answered Merton, fumbling in his pocket, and producing a bill: “There now, and for heaven’s sake be quick.”

“Well, that ’ere cashier, is expected to be back to that house to-morrow mornin’, but he’s bribed the fellur as runs the place not to let it out.”

Not waiting to thank his informant, Merton returned to the inn.

“See here,” he said to the landlord, “step aside one moment, I want to see you about something important.” The landlord’s eye kindled with speculation, and, rubbing his

hands briskly, he retired with his man to a corner remote from the crowd.

“My friend,” said Merton, “I want to stay here all night, but very privately. You wont mention my being here to any one, will you?” And to add emphasis to his request, he pressed an eagle into the landlord’s palm.

“All k’rect, sir. An’ now I come to think of it, the man you enquired for is to be here before to-morrow noon.” What a wondrous quickener of the memory is money.

The night passed quietly, and next morning found Mr. Merton up fresh and early awaiting his enemy. As it neared noon his anxiety increased, and he began drinking heavily. Noon arrived, but no cashier. Mr. Merton still continued to ply his glass, and one hour later, he was buried in a heavy sleep.

How long he slept he knew not; but he was awakened suddenly by some one shaking him violently.

Starting to his feet, and leaning on the table for support, he found himself facing the shabby man who had first volunteered

his evidence. "Stranger," he said, "you'd better git around lively. The chap you are after's ben here, and has seed you, and is now making tracks for Ferguson."

"Go and get my buggy, quick," said Mr. Merton hoarsely. His head was dizzy, and there was a strange ringing in his ears; but he was sufficiently conscious to follow the bent of his revenge.

A minute later, he was climbing into the buggy; but so unsteady was he, that it required the help of his disinterested informant.

"Be keerful stranger, keep your hand steady. That hoss is a leetle too lively for you."

He had scarcely spoken, when Merton, turning the horse towards Ferguson, raised his whip, and brought it down with all his strength upon the poor animal's back. The horse reared violently, and so sudden was the jerk, that the reins slipped from the driver's hands. Affrighted still more by the dragging reins, the horse lost all control, and started off at full speed. Mr. Merton caught hold of the dash-board and held on mechanically. About a hundred yards down

the road was a small railed bridge, crossing a stream. Quicker than words can tell it, they had arrived there, and as the runaway swerved to one side, one of the buggy's wheels was caught by the railing, and the sudden shock threw Mr. Merton violently from the vehicle. Before the horse could extricate himself, several men had caught his bridle, and were calming him by patting him gently. But Mr. Merton moved not from the place where he had fallen. The partially-healed wound upon his head had again been opened, and he was senseless. They carried him to the inn, where it required many hours to revive him.

The next day he was too weak and dizzy to leave the inn. He was prompted more than once to send word to his wife, but pride restrained him; he would keep the shameful accident forever as a secret.

Wednesday afternoon had come, and he was much better. But it would not do to start for home till all the marks of his bruises had disappeared. About three o'clock, he fell into a troubled slumber. Dreams crowded upon him. He was again in quest of the cashier; and had pursued

him through a wild country. Suddenly his enemy could flee no further, for he had come to the brow of a precipice. "I've got you, now, you villain," cried the pursuer. But what was his horror and dismay, when the cashier suddenly lifted Ada from the ground, raised her in his arms, and held her over the precipice. He could see the calm, sweet look of his daughter, as she stretched out her hands, entreating him to come and save her. Suddenly the dream changed. Ada was lost in a trackless desert. He wandered about through the blinding sand in quest of her; and at times would catch a glimpse of her white garments. But ere he reached her, a great mountain of sand rose between them, and he would again be baffled. Worn out, finally by the search, he threw himself upon the sand, and fell into a sort of dose. He was aroused by the voice he so well knew. "I am not lost, papa: it is you who are lost. Come home, papa."

The loving, little face, sorrowful, but bright with tears then bent down to his, and imprinted a soft kiss upon his cheek.

Then he awoke. He started up in bed, and as his eyes opened, he seemed to see Ada

thinning into the darkness of the evening, and he still felt the warm kiss upon his cheek.

“My God,” he cried involuntarily, “was Ada really beside me? Did she say, ‘Papa, come home?’”

“John Merton,” said a man who was sitting beside his bed, and whom he had not noticed before, “no one has been here but myself. Do you know me, John?”

“Why, Clarke, how came you here?”

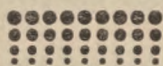
“I chanced to hear that you were in this inn,” answered Mr. Clarke, who was an old friend, “and I considered it my business to see you at once. John, John, my dear fellow, is it possible that you have left your wife and child, alone and unprotected, living, as you do, upon the very bounds of the city?”

John pressed his hand to his forehead; the voice of his child was still ringing in his ears.

“Yes, it is possible; and I am a brute, Clarke, as sure as we are in this room; I know that I am needed at home. Ada has called me, my hand is unsteady, my brain is whirling; for the sake of our old

friendship drive me home; and hurry, hurry, for my brain is burning with anxiety."

Mr. Clarke, as he listened to these earnest words, grew still more grave. A few moments later, he helped the anxious father into a buggy, and then jumping in himself gave free rein to the horse. And the animal gathering all its energy bounded away into the night, as though he too were affected by some dread presentiment.



CHAPTER XV.

Then like tired breezes didst thou sink to rest,
Nor one, one pang the awful change confessed.
Death stole in silence o'er that lovely face,
And touched each feature with a new-born grace;
On cheek and brow unearthly beauty lay,
And told that life's poor cares had passed away!
In my last hour, be Heaven so kind to me!
I ask no more but this — to die like thee.

— *Sprague.*

THE afternoon when Mr. Merton left his home was most melancholy to his wife. It was becoming plainer to her every day that one prop of her happiness had been removed — perhaps forever. No longer could her mind dwell with delight on the kindest of husbands; no longer could she count upon his prompt return at the conclusion of his business engagements; no longer could she listen with pleasure to his droll remarks; for his gay genius was departing with his sober habits. In proportion as her love for her husband weakened, did her affection for Ada strengthen.

The hours had worn slowly on, till the clock marked eight of the evening; and they were still waiting for the familiar foot-step. Ada, noticing her mother's distress, did all in her power to make time pass pleasantly. She played her liveliest melodies upon the piano, and sang over and over the "Eve of St. Agnes;" and as her mother listened, and thought of the child's generous efforts, she felt her whole heart going out to her daughter.

"Ada, come here, my child."

When Ada, leaving the piano, had nestled in her mother's bosom, the mother pressed her warmly to her heart, as though some one were seeking to wrest the child away.

"Ada, Ada, my child, you are my only love, now. Without you this earth would be a hell."

"O, mamma!" cried the child deprecatingly.

"I tell you, my child," pursued the madly doting mother, "I would rather suffer all the hideous torments I have ever read or heard of, than be separated from you for a day. O Ada, you are my whole joy, my whole happiness."

The child was astonished at her mother's almost incoherent passionateness; she knew not that the human heart must ever have some God; that nothing but the Infinite can satisfy its cravings; and that if the heart recklessly spurn the Infinite, it must turn with an unappeasable and ever unsatisfied hunger to the finite.

"Mamma," she said "I know that you love me very much: why can't you love God too?"

"It is out of the question, my child. If you could but read my mind you would readily understand me. It may be, my darling, that, as you once said, I am blind and cannot see the light; but certain it is, my dearest, that I cannot, even for a moment, firmly believe that there is a God. But to tell you the truth, Ada, since the occurrences of the last few days, I almost wish I could believe."

"O, I'm so glad you say that," said Ada; "for if you wish to believe, God will surely in his great, great love open your eyes."

"It is dreadful to live this way," continued the mother. "Your poor papa is becoming so unhappy, darling."

“Poor papa,” sighed Ada, “God doesn’t seem to grant my prayers quickly; but I am sure that you and papa will soon see things in the true way.”

For some time they sat in silence, and motionless save only for the passionate caresses of the mother. Finally, Mrs. Merton said:—

“Ada, your voice sounded strange this evening; you seem to be weak and tired.”

“Yes, mamma, I have felt a little weak for the past three days, and there’s a pain in my side. I feel very tired to-night.”

“Yes, my dearest, and I noticed you coughing a little. Let me take you to bed, this instant; your health is much too precious to be wasted in night-watches for *your father*.” There was a tone of bitterness in the last two words.

Ada begged to stay up, so fearful was she that her mother would be overwhelmed by sadness, if left alone. But the mother was firm. She helped the child to bed and, kissing her with even more passionateness than she had before evinced, left the child for the night. No sooner was Ada alone,

than rising to her knees in bed she commenced her night prayers.

Her very heart seemed to speak in behalf of father and mother. She passed almost an hour in this position, and lay down, not that she had finished her prayer, but from very weakness. The pain in her side continued to increase, and she experienced a sense of weakness growing upon her. But her mind seemed to become more acute. The slightest sound arrested her attention, for she could not turn her thoughts from her father out in the chilly night. Then flashed through her imagination, the vision of her mother, sitting tearless, alone, sorrowful by the hearth.

“Poor mamma,” she thought, “how unhappy she must now be. If she believed in God, she would have some one to whom she might now speak her sorrows.”

The thought of her mother’s loneliness seemed to haunt her brain: she could not dismiss it: the image of her mother alone and weeping without one heart near by to sympathize so clung to her, that at last she resolved to arise, and bear her company. Putting on the beautiful garments of the

morning, she stole gently towards her mother's room. The night had grown very chill, and, as she walked along the damp hall, a shiver passed through her frame, and the feeling of weakness increased.

The door reached, she stood for a moment with her hand upon the knob, doubting whether she should enter. Suddenly she felt a difficulty in respiration, the pain in the side became violent, and her head grew dizzy. Throwing open the door, she staggered into the room.

"Mamma, help me—I am ill." This was all she could say.

"O Ada!" cried the agonized mother, catching the child in her arms, "tell me quick, darling, what is the matter?" and she laid the child tenderly on her bed.

"I find it hard to breathe, mamma, and the pain at my side, and I'm dizzy." Ada's voice had a strange ring in it, and this symptom frightened Mrs. Merton most of all.

"Maggie, Maggie," she called out, going to the hallway. In a short time, the maid appeared.

"Go, Maggie, quick, quick, call Bob, and tell him to run for life, and get the nearest

doctor—O my darling, my child,” she cried hastening back to Ada, “my child—you must not, you shall not be ill.”

“Poor mamma,” Ada murmured, and tears of pity were on her cheek. “Get me my crucifix, mamma.”

“No, dearest, I cannot leave you. Do you breathe easier yet, my child?”

“I—I think not, mamma.”

Maggie just then entered the room with the patient’s crucifix. Ada clutched it tightly, and kissed it with love beaming upon her face.

“Mamma,” she whispered, “I am very happy; but I believe I am going to die. Send for a priest.”

The words were scarcely spoken, when Maggie hastened from the room; the poor mother grew ashen pale, and threw herself upon her knees, beside the fair child.

“Come, my darling, don’t think of death.—O God, O God! when will the doctor come?” In solemn moments the name of God *will* rise to the unbeliever’s lip.

Ten minutes later, a doctor arrived post haste. After a brief examination, he shook his head.

“O doctor, what is it? tell me, quick,” Mrs. Merton entreated, as she caught his arm, and fixed her eyes upon him as though to read his thoughts.

“Be calm, madam. — God help you; is she an only child? — But she *may* recover. It is a case of aggravated pneumonia. She has been suffering from it slightly for some days back, very probably; for her case is more advanced than I generally find at the first visit.”

May none of us ever see such a look of despair as settled upon Mrs. Merton’s face. Pneumonia! it was a disease terrible in its ravages that year!

The doctor assisted by Maggie did all that could be done, while the mother with that look of despair which never changed stood like a marble statue, her eyes bent upon the fragile child.

Presently a priest entered the room.

“Mamma,” whispered Ada, “this Communion will be for you and papa.”

At sight of the priest, Mrs. Merton moved towards him with an angry gesture; but the appealing glance of Ada changed her

purpose, and with a moan she allowed him to do his work alone.

It was already nearing the dawn, and, for the first time since the child's sickness, she thought of her husband.

"Bob," she said, "go and scour the town, and bring *that man* to his daughter."

When Mrs. Merton entered the room again she saw upon Ada's face the perfect repose of tranquil happiness.

Monday and Tuesday passed slowly; but the mother never for a moment left the side of the suffering child; never for a moment relaxed her watchfulness. Often Maggie begged her to rest for a short time, but to no avail. Sister Felicitas shared the poor lady's vigil, and, despite their many disparities, a silent love grew up between them.

It was about seven o'clock on Wednesday evening. Ada, whose life was fast ebbing away, was lying in a sort of slumber. Beside her were Maggie, Sister Felicitas, and the mother, all three watching the child's slightest movement. Of a sudden, Ada's face began to change; first it looked sad, and then affectionate, and finally she opened her eyes, and gazed about her.

“Is papa here?” she said.

“Ada, my darling, are you suffering pain?” asked the heart-broken mother, resting her cheek against the face of her child.

“Very little, mamma. I thought papa was near me, and in trying to touch him I awoke. But I will see him some day, please God—but not here mamma. Are you listening?—are you near me?”

“Speak, my angel; I am here.”

“Then tell poor papa that I leave him my—dearest love.” She spoke with difficulty; but the light of a happiness rarely experienced in this world shone upon her like a glory.

At times, Sister Felicitas would raise the crucifix to the dying child’s lips, and with a look of gratitude, she would kiss it with inexpressible tenderness. The mother was speechless with agony; but not a tear started from her eyes. She stood statue-like, gazing as one who looks upon all that is precious for the last time. Suddenly a divine brightness came over the child’s features; she rose half-way in bed, looking with eager eyes as upon some vision. Then turning

towards her mother, she smiled sweetly, and said;—

“Mamma, I’m going home. — Jesus! Mary!”

At that moment a hasty step was heard upon the stairs; but when Mr. Merton stepped breathless into the room, he saw a nun upon her knees, Maggie crying bitterly, and his wife gazing fixedly upon the body of his darling Ada!



CHAPTER XVI.

The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree
I planted; they have torn me, and I bleed;
I should have known what fruit would spring from
such a seed. — *Byron.*

FOR a moment Mr. Merton stood like one bereft of his senses. The room seemed to turn round and round; lights gleamed before his eyes; and his very heart stood still. Then there flashed through his brain the remembrance of the God whom he had so often mocked; whom he had so bitterly denied; who now turned upon him with the power of His right arm.

“My God! my God!” he moaned, striking his forehead with his hands.

For the first time the statue-like woman turned from the dead child, and fixing her large, tearless eyes upon him, broke into a loud, harsh, grating laugh.

“My God, my God,” she repeated with disdain; “*you, you, YOU* come here with talk of God; you come to mock me with your lying tongue. Look there;” she went on

pointing to the body; “do you see that lovely form; that fair brow, never yet ruffled by an impure, an unholy thought; those lips that smiled with a beauty I never, never more shall see? Where now is the little life that was worth a million such as yours? Gone, gone, and gone forever. All that beauty is but clay, earth, and the worms shall devour it. Never more shall Ada’s loving heart beat against mine; never more shall her happy voice bring joy to my bosom; never more shall her dear smile, her warm kiss bear joy and sweetness to my bereaved heart—for she is gone, gone! O, it is too cruel; it cannot be. Such a noble nature was not made for a few brief years. She is not dead—Ada, my darling, my love, my child, my only child, speak to me. Let your voice but whisper, so that I know you live.—O, it is too cruel—Ada, my child, my child speak to me.” And she threw herself beside the lifeless form, and covered the serene brow with kisses.

“O Mary, my wife, I deserve it all; it is my fault,” cried the agonized, humiliated husband. “But be calm, dear Mary: the child is dead.”

“Ah,” she answered turning upon him in a phrensy of rage, “*you* talk of being calm! you, who have taught me that death is an eternal separation! Away from me, you accursed one. She is *not* dead; and you who have taken away from me my God, would now take away the loveliest heart that ever beat. — Speak to me, Ada! Ada, my child speak to me.”

Sister Felicitas now came forward, and laying her hand upon Mrs. Merton’s brow, led the poor mother to a chair; and the husband, fearing that his presence might excite his wife to madness, bent one longing lingering look upon the child’s angelic features, and repaired to his own room — but not to rest.

Up and down he walked, “reaping the whirlwind he had so carefully sown.” In his ears rang a text of scripture that had impressed him in his early years, “Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you, my friends, for the hand of the Lord hath touched me.” His pride was shattered, and in the supreme bitterness of the moment, his eyes were fully opened to the light.

“Yes,” he bitterly acknowledged, “I have

fought against God; I have tried to despise Him; I have cast Him from my heart, and endeavored to root Him from my mind; I have shattered the faith of a wife; and now I find that His arm is not shortened. — My God, my God, have pity on me; I am not worthy to breathe thy hallowed name. — O sainted Ada, pray for your traitorous father.” And he sank upon his knees, and bent his head, and prayed, with the blinding tears running down his cheek, for forgiveness, for peace, for resignation.

He was aroused by the entrance of Maggie, whose face was marked by an expression worse even than grief.

“O, Mr. Merton,” she cried, “for God’s sake come to your wife; she laughs, and smiles, and insists on sending for more doctors, and says that Ada is sleeping too long.”

His darkest forboding was realized. His wife, too, was in danger of being taken from him; but by a still more horrid monster than death. Entering the solemn apartment, he saw the mother still gazing fondly on the corpse, and saying;—

“You are sleeping too long, Ada. Ada, my child, my child, speak to me.”

At the noise of his footfall, she turned and fronted him, without, it would seem, recognizing that it was her husband.

“Kind sir,” she said, “if you have pity for me, go and get the best doctors of the city. She may still be cured.”

“Mary, my dear wife,” answered the hapless man, “can you not see that our child is dead?”

“’Tis a lie—a black, black lie. Leave me, sir, leave me, and get the best physicians.—Ada, my child, my child, speak to me.”

Mr. Merton, thinking that the testimony of the best medical experts might gain her belief, resolved on fulfilling her behest. It was early dawn, when he left the house; and as the morning sun covered the earth with beauty, it shone upon a tearless mother, still crying:—

“Ada, my child, my child, speak to me.”



CHAPTER XVII.

Lay her i' the earth,
And from her pure and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring. — *Shakspeare.*

THE physicians held their useless consultation, and assured Mrs. Merton that the child was dead. But not a tear dimmed the mother's eye. She threw herself beside her child, and from time to time moaned in a manner that would touch the most callous heart. She was insensible to all about her, one person only excepted, and that was her husband.

If he entered the room she would kindle with fury, denouncing him as the destroyer of her happiness.

Dressed in her first communion clothes, and with a fresh chaplet of roses, lilies and violets about her brow, Ada lay in her coffin, the serene, youthful, tranquil face still seeming to triumph over the destroying hand of death.

Beside the coffin was Sister Felicitas looking with tearful love upon "the angel

of the convent.” One by one, during the day, her little school-mates, robed for the occasion in their white communion dresses, entered the room to take one last, regretful look at the face of her whom in life they had so venerated.

The unhappy father stood without, for he feared to madden his wife by appearing before her. The previous night of suffering had marked his features with an unsparing hand. As each little girl stepped from the apartment of the dead into the hall, he would stay her, and ask humbly to be remembered in her prayers.

Sister Felicitas was greatly alarmed at the condition of Mrs. Merton, who, since the preceding Sunday, had neither eaten anything nor taken a moment’s repose.

“My dear Madam,” she whispered, when the children had gone, “come, let me take you to your room for a while. Rest for an hour or so. It will refresh you wonderfully; and then, no doubt, you will be able to weep.”

The mother ceased moaning for the moment, and turning her burning eyes upon the nun, she said;—

“Tell me; is Ada dead?”

“Yes, Mrs. Merton, she is.”

“Then I shall never rest again,” and moaning as before, she again addressed herself to the dead child. For another hour, she was motionless, and were it not for her moaning one would have been unable to discern in her any trace of life. Then raising her eyes to the nun, she again spoke;—

“Is my child dead forever?”

“No, dear madam,” Sister Felicitas made answer; “she is in the glory of God even now, I trust, and at the last day, her body will again be joined fair and incorruptible to the pure spirit that made it be so beloved by us all in this poor life.”

“And do you believe in God?”

“Assuredly, madam.”

Mrs. Merton peered around the room with suspicious eyes, as if fearing that she were watched, and whispered;—

“Where is God?”

“Everywhere, dear Madam. In Him we live, move and have our being.”

The poor lady moaned, as she again sought Ada’s face, and muttered, “If it were only so; but I know it is false.”

Saturday was the last sad day that was to see Ada's mortal remains upon the face of the earth, and in the morning accompanied by friends, and all the children of the convent, the bereaved parents set out for Calvary cemetery. Mrs. Merton still evinced a loathing for her husband, and clung to Sister Felicitas.

It was a beautiful morning of spring; one of nature's halcyon days; a day that would warm the blood of an old man till he felt young again; a day that ran riot in the early wealth of nature's gifts. And the birds sang with such a sweet sense of new life. The very flowers seemed alive to the smiles of the sun. "But all things are dark to sorrow," and the childless mother, heeding neither flower nor bird, nor tree, nor field, strained her eyes eagerly after the white-plumed hearse and moaned;—

"Ada, my child, my child!"

And now they stand around Ada's last resting place; the mother leaning upon Sister Felicitas; the father, looking prematurely old, standing opposite his wife, and beside the priest in attendance. While the rites of the dead are being performed, a

little bird on a tree beside the grave is making the place vocal with his music.

Already the last prayers have been recited, the coffin has been lowered, and the saddest sound that mortal ear knows, the dull thud of the dirt falling upon the coffin, is heard. But one handful had fallen, when the mother releasing herself from the hold of Sister Felicitas, and drawing a dagger (Mr. Merton remembered her promise now) said, in a voice unnaturally calm and clear;—

“My child shall not be taken from me so; stop your work, men, for I swear that I will stab the first man that covers my child from me forever.”

As she stood there with her large wildly-flashing eyes, her form drawn up to its full height, her determined face, and the jewelled hand clasping the dagger, a thrill of silent horror went through the assemblage. Some of the little children hid their faces. A dead silence, broken only by the singing of that one little bird, came over all. John Merton was the first to speak.

“Mary, my dear,” he cried in imploring accents, “forgive me for having so long and so cruelly deceived you. Ada is not gone

forever; but is at rest in God. Put away that dagger, Mary; you are unreasonably excited. We shall soon meet our darling"—his strong voice faltered as he spoke—"in a brighter world."

"Liar, fiend!" screamed the wife; "*you* dare to talk of God; *you* dare to speak of Ada in a brighter land; *you* who plucked the idea of God from my soul. You have taken my God from me, so that I shall never find Him again." There was a pitiful sadness, the sadness of a broken heart, in these last words.

"Yes," she continued in the midst of a painful silence, "you have taught me knowledge of good and evil—and may the day I first met you be accursed. Hypocrite, liar, may no happiness ever again find place in your blackened heart.—And *you* tell me there is a God! Where is he? tell me that! O God, O God, if I could but find you!"

"I tell you, Mary," answered the stricken husband, "I acknowledge it before the world, I have cruelly, bitterly deceived you. I was a madman, a fool; and like the fool I said in my heart there is no God. But never did my mind fully consent to what I

taught. Trust me, Mary, never, never for one moment did I fully believe what I taught you to believe but too well."

Mrs. Merton made him no answer; Sister Felicitas was whispering to her gently; and Mr. Merton signed to the grave diggers, who were staring with amazement at the unwonted scene, to continue with their work. But they had not fairly begun, when the mother sprang forward dagger in hand. With incredible quickness, Mr. Merton was beside her, and stayed her hand in the very act of striking the nearest grave-digger.

She struggled violently with her husband, and before he had wrested the dagger from her grasp, she had inflicted upon him several slight wounds. Then, as if inspired by a new idea, she attempted to jump into the open grave. But they stayed her.

"Let me alone," she shrieked, "I cannot find God here; I will go with Ada, and perhaps in her company I may meet Him."

She became more violent; strong but kind hands were laid upon her, and she was held fast till the grave was filled. But it was evident to all that she was, for the time, insane — nay, a maniac. In the intervals

of her mad strugglings, she would stare around wildly, and cry out.;

“God! Where is He? They have taken Him away from me, and I shall never find Him more!”



CHAPTER XVIII.

The loppéd tree in time may grow again,
Most naked plants renew both fruit and flower,
The sorriest wight may find release from pain,
The driest soil suck in some moistening shower.

— *Southwell.*

O there is never sorrow of heart
That shall lack a timely end,
If but to God we turn, and ask
Of Him to be our friend.

Wordsworth.

BITTER thoughts, useless regrets, gnawing remorse and dreadful fears tortured the sleepless brain of John Merton on the night succeeding the scene at Calvary cemetery. Mary Merton had lost her reason, and was now under the kindly charge of Sister Felicitas, who seemed to exercise a most soothing influence over the unhappy woman. Her last oft-repeated cry still rang in his ears;—

“Tell me, tell me, where is my God. They have hidden Him from me, and I shall never see Him more.” And now without even the presence of his wife, the wretched man felt with stinging consciousness that

he was alone in the world. But could he not turn to God? This was the thought he had been debating since Ada's death. With the dreadful effects of his unbelief coming home to him in the very present, his sins seemed to his troubled imagination too heinous for pardon. The enemy of God, fearing to lose his soul in one way, was resolved to gain it in another. "Yes," cried the evil voice, "your happiness is gone; you would be foolish to ask God for help; for you have treated Him too badly. Make away with yourself, and do not wait for more troubles." The man trembled at the thought; still it had a sort of fascination for him. The most dangerous hour in Mr. Merton's life had now come. But a new saint was praying for him, doubtless. How long his dangerous reverie would have continued it is impossible to say, had not Maggie entered the room. Maggie noticed his despondency immediately; and she felt that her master might now begin a new life, if she but conducted her part successfully. The kind woman's eyes were red and swollen with constant weeping; in her hand she held a book.

“Mr. Merton, my dear master,” she began with a countenance in which smiles and tears were holding a doubtful contest for supremacy; “Mr. Merton, my dear master, God forgive me for all the hard things, I have been sayin’ against you, such as callin’ you a grand Turk, the great Mogul and such like. There was a time when I really did be hoping that the hand of God would fall heavy on you—but I never thought that you’d be made so miserable. You’ve been a good master to me, Mr. Merton, and I would do anything to serve you; and you may be thinking it bold, God love you, but I’ve come to ask you to read this little chapter, which I have left open.” And she laid the book on the table at his elbow. “I know how you feel, sir, but I know too that if you wait a little, you’ll see your way clear—which I’d like to see anybody say anything against it.”

Maggie was shrewd enough to perceive that her visit was not wholly unwelcome, and acting on the principle of letting well-enough alone, curtsied out of the room. Merton, with no little curiosity, picked up the book from the table, and read. It was

the chapter on the prodigal son; and as his eye ran along the lines, streams of softening grace poured into his soul. Tears came to his eyes at the thought of so merciful a God. Over and over again, he read the sublime chapter; and at each reading he gained fresh courage and strength. At length he put the book down, resolving that he too would arise and go to his Father's house; and forthwith like a suddenly remembered dream, there came back to him, glowing in the rosy light of hope, the memories of his boyhood's faith and innocence. Bright visions of old faces, old friends, old scenes returned with the vividness of yesterday. He remembered, too, how previous to departing for the non-sectarian school, he had paid a last visit to his teacher and father-confessor at the St. Louis University; how the good father had earnestly warned him to guard his faith; how in shaking hands at parting, the priest had said, "John, my boy, the day may come when you will be in deep sorrow; sorrow of a kind that no earthly consolation can assuage; but remember, as long as I live, you shall find a friend who will

do all that can be done to be of service to you."

This priest still lived; now indeed, an old man; but hale, active and with the same warm heart. Many years ago, he had called on Mr. Merton; but the fallen Catholic had shown him such marked coldness as to imply that further intercourse would be disagreeable. Now, however, the humbled man was resolved to open himself entirely to the good father. Before Mr. Merton had concluded his reverie, day was shining into his apartment. Rising to leave he called Maggie to him.

"Maggie," he said, "you have done me a great—a very great service. One thing more I ask of you—that you pray fervently for me to obtain the grace of making a good confession." And as Mr. Merton turned from her, Maggie cried for very joy.

Half an hour later, a haggard, care-worn man presented himself at the St. Louis University, and called for Father Elliott. After a short delay, there entered the parlor an aged but tall and stately gentleman, with a venerable benevolent face. He recognized Mr. Merton, and with a smile so genial that

his visitor felt in better cheer, he grasped his hand in both of his own.

“Why John, John! How delighted I am to see you, old fellow. I have been awaiting you for years, my dear boy. So you’re in trouble? But come right up to my room, John. I know part of your story already. But I’ll warrant before you leave me, that you’ll look much happier than you do now.”

“I am sure, Father,” answered John, “that you will be able to lighten my load. Indeed, I now feel the same confidence in you, as when I was your little scholar.”

In great troubles, there is nothing that so lightens the heart, as to have a sympathizing friend to whom one can unbosom oneself: and as John Merton told his sad tale to his genial confessor, every word seemed to roll a burden from his bosom. Several hours had flown by before he had come to an end, and received absolution.

“My dear sir,” said the Father, “be patient for a week, say till next Sunday, and I am sure, by that time I will be able to give you a good account of your wife. In the meantime, don’t go near her; but leave all to me. Soon, you will perceive in

these apparent calamities the finger of our good Father, who in His mercy by taking your child pure and untainted from this world, will have led you and your wife to the true Church. Here now is a book, which I wish you to read carefully. And next Wednesday afternoon, mind, you are to come here and stop with us till Sunday—a retreat you know, in preparation for a new life. Then on Sunday, you will be well prepared, please God, for receiving into your heart the divine Saviour who has shown you so much mercy. Now, John, I will see to Mrs. Merton immediately. Good bye, my dear fellow,—you know where my room is now; and I expect to see you often.”

True to his promise, Father Elliott set out immediately for the convent. He had formed a theory to the effect that as Mrs. Merton’s seeming insanity had been caused by the idea that Ada had fallen back into the nothingness whence she came, so she could be restored to reason, by being led gradually to believe in the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, and the life of the blessed. Once that she might

hope to meet Ada again, her mind would become tranquilized.

Admitted into her presence, he found the poor lady pacing restlessly up and down her narrow apartment.

“O, sir,” she cried upon seeing him, “can you tell me where God has hidden Himself? I have lost Him, and I fear He is gone forever.”

The zealous priest answered her gently, and, by his kind but earnest manner, soon won her confidence. After a long conversation, he left her calmer, but still unconvinced.

Day after day, he repeated his visits; and insensibly preparing her mind, he finally brought her on to assent by reason to the existence of God, and then to the immortality of the soul. She listened intently; suddenly the whole truth appeared to flash upon her; and as she realized the happy change, tears, the first she had shed since Ada's death, flooded her eyes. From that hour, she quickly recovered.

In the meantime, Mr. Merton entered upon his retreat with a will, and the three days spent in retirement were to him the

most precious of his life. On Sunday morning, he received with tender love and in all humility our blessed Lord. Long after the Mass was over, he still was praying, when a light touch upon the shoulder called him back to the world. It was Father Elliott, who motioned him to come outside. Following the priest, who was dressed in secular clothes, to the door, he saw a carriage with no — yes — it was old Bob himself for the driver.

“Why Bob,” he gasped.

“Lor’ lub you, massa.” —

“Jump in, my dear fellow — not a word now to man, woman or child,” said the father, whose smiling face spoke volumes. “Let the horses fly, Bob. And mind you, John, don’t ask me a single question.”

Off rattled the coach; Father Elliott threw himself back in his seat and smiled at Merton, who scrupulously mindful of his companion’s monition asked no questions, but resigned himself to the broad field of conjecture. In as short a time, almost, as it takes to narrate it, they pulled up before the convent, gained admittance, and seated themselves in the parlor. Mr. Merton was

just beginning to collect his thoughts, when a lady entered the room, and with a cry of joy threw herself upon his bosom. It was his wife, needless to say; her face still bearing lines of sorrow, but sorrow that had been chastened and refined.

“My dear, John; thanks to God, that our eyes have at length been opened.”

“Thank God,” echoed the husband with no less fervor. “Ada has indeed gained her prayers.”

“Yes, John, and though my heart is still mourning her loss; yet if I had the power to call her back now, I would not do so.”

“Nor I, my dear. A few years more, and, please God, we shall meet her in Heaven.”

* * * * *

Six years have passed; and Mr. and Mrs. Merton, still young, still active, are happier than ever we knew them to be in the past. God has blessed them with another child, master Robin Merton, who, as Bob declares, “am a marble ob engine-annuity.” — Although a good boy, Robin is something of a contrast to Ada: he has a remarkable facility for creating minor disturbances;

and after he has “worried” the cook to death by stealing her preserves and pastries, and set Maggie running after him on vengeance intent for “mussing up everything,” he makes his mamma’s lap a harbor of refuge, and asks:—

“I say, mamma, Robin’s like sisser Ada, ain’t he?” This question being generally unequivocally negatived, Robin toddles off in great disgust, to effect new conquests.

When, occasionally of a fine day, they take him out to Calvary Cemetery, and show him a little grave blossoming with roses, lilies and violets; and tell him what Ada had said of these flowers, he looks very serious, and says.

“Poor sisser Ada! Bobby’s doin to be dood too; so’s he can do to heaven tum day, an’ see his little sisser.”



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